

# A TALE Unfolded: Executive Summary

David Jenkins

[Independent External evaluator]

## Introduction

As a tactic of surprise to banish distortion, the artist can “make the strange familiar and the familiar strange”. [Lemon, L. and Reis J, *Russian Formalist Criticism* (1965)]

An executive summary offers a précised analysis but necessary does so at the expense of subtlety and nuanced judgment. Conventional wisdom holds that busy policy makers prefer predigested pabulum to raw meat but in my view the devil is always in the detail, and readers are urged to engage with the full report.

TALE has proved itself to be in general a quality offering judged by a variety of criteria and substantially fulfilled its political and educational objectives with one major exception. TALE has clearly registered its contribution to the European policy debate favorably with the European Commission, which kindly responded to my enquiry by forwarding me the following information note:

We would assess the situation as follows: According to the feedback we received, trainers' participation in TALE successfully contributed to their personal professional development.

We have also noted that:

- TALE reinvigorated debate on youth work competences prompting stakeholders to improve their own quality development schemes for trainers;
- TALE was accompanied by research work dealing with trainer competences and recognition, bridging the worlds of youth work, youth research and youth policy (e.g. via the MA on youth work supported by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership);
- TALE was instrumental in widening the audience of debate regarding training quality, recognition and youth policy e.g. by transferring results to the Youth in Action's Training of Trainers.
- Lessons learned during the implementation of TALE (e.g. regarding trainer competences) serve as valuable input to the renewed European Training Strategy of the Youth in Action Program. The SALTO-Youth Training and Cooperation Resource Centre and the network of Youth in Action National Agencies played an important role in this respect.

This is a judgment with which I concur, particularly with respect to the last two points. I would be less upbeat about the accompanying ‘research work’ and the contribution of TALE to the research aspects of the practice/research/policy triangle. The link with the MA EYS is tenuous.

Although there is room to question whether TALE is the final template for generalized Training of Trainers (ToT) – I would prefer a mixture of models and Udo Teichmann obviously felt it was time to go back to the drawing board-- it is clear that provision bearing a family resemblance to TALE should be a part of the mix. However, it was not a program

free from controversy and experienced one or two shortcomings, in particular neither solving the issue of the pedagogy of NFE online nor progressing the recognition debate technically in the direction of external validation, although its explorations around competency profiling and the Competence Improvement Map (CIM) suggested possibilities as well as exposed problems.

## **Achievements and shortcomings**

In the judgment of the evaluator the achievements of TALE significantly outweighed the shortcomings, but it is important to seek to learn lessons from both. Give or take one or two controversial areas, the following account can be taken as reflecting a consensus held by almost all my informants, although slanted to some extent towards my own judgment in the cautious belief that sometimes an outsider sees more. The many successes, some meriting the term inspirational, can be acknowledged and built upon; the various shortcomings, ambivalences or ambiguities may be used advantageously to chart rocks and sandbanks that future mariners may be able to avoid. Particularly pleasing have been the strength, dedication and professionalism of the course team and the very high level of participant endorsement. The practical projects undertaken by the participants were impressive and in other circumstances might have supported declarative portfolios capable of external moderation and validation beyond the disappointing two-part certificate currently on offer.

Viewed incrementally, even weaknesses in the overall profile, like TALE's relative lack of success with regard to technically progressing the recognition of non-formal learning in ToT by linking competence profiling to proxy indicators, or the partially flawed excursion into online learning, can be viewed as a gradualist step forward along what was always going to prove a long and difficult road.

Although I accept responsibility for the balance of judgments in this summary, other viewpoints have been taken into account. A more nuanced view of many of the issues can be found throughout the full report.

## **Significant achievements**

1. TALE has added an impressive example of advanced European ToT to the pantheon of examples open to critical appraisal and did so in a way that kept faith with the core NFE principles and practices that the course team perceived to be under threat. It has been in general very well received by its participants, European policy makers, national stakeholders and potential critics, including relevant NGOs and this external evaluator. It is widely and correctly perceived as a quality offering and as such has considerably advanced the 'soft recognition' of work in this area.
2. The TALE curriculum met the conditions of a curriculum specification proposed by Lawrence Stenhouse, i.e. 'communicating the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice'. This is a necessary if not a sufficient condition of its legacy being built on. The existence of one effective and well described translation into practice enhances its right to be considered a candidate for adoption or adaptation in future ToT provision; the TALE model, like the ATTE model, is now an available resource in the public domain.

3. In many respects, TALE has been innovative, with the course team willing to take significant risks and push the boundaries, including of their own competences. Even if one or two of the risks did not come off, there was a perceptible air of excitement about TALE as befits its status as an exploratory program working on the growing edge.
4. Limited but nevertheless important progress was made in further analyzing competency frameworks and profiles for ToT and in considering ways in which a portfolio approach adding evidence to declarative statements might reflect competence development using the instrument of a competence improvement map (CIM).
5. Outside of the online LOFT feature, where there were some by now well-understood difficulties, the TALE pedagogy was wholly appropriate with an adroit use of multimodalities and activities drawing on the full range of methods of internal model making<sup>1</sup>. Participant trainers were encouraged to accept responsibility for their own learning and become co-producers of the collective TALE learning experience. Tutoring at the residential seminars was flexible and imaginative and to my mind sound and effective within a broadly facilitating NFE ideology, although I would describe it in some of its aspects as a decent compromise between formal and non-formal methods in so far as these can be distinguished<sup>2</sup>. There was a pleasing embracing of direct explanation, artistic idioms, oblique approaches through metaphor, physical theatre, group activity, fervent discussion and supported reflection. The tutors attracted affection as well as admiration.
6. Although the LOFT in general did not live up to its promise, it was for a few of the stronger candidates the opportunity for profound peer learning, and this gave some insight into what might have been achieved had the online aspects of TALE been both compulsory and adequately driven pedagogically. Many of the ideas could be built on, from the overall architecture to some of the more imaginative activities. Synchronous use of the LOFT in the 'open days' proved a valuable use of the platform, as did the four themed 'teatimes' in anticipation of the second residential seminar in Berlin.
7. TALE in general fulfilled the political and strategic objectives as set for it by the Steering Group, taking into account an overall analysis of the situation pertaining to advanced ToT at the time. This remained true even though some members of the course team were ambivalent about some aspects of the agenda.
8. The experience of being a participant trainer on TALE, as recounted through the focus group and recorded in survey data under the auspices of the course team (with both closed and open questions) was in almost all respects a very positive one, particularly with respect to the low key but expert supportive mentoring of training projects and the fulfillment of personal learning goals. The emotional crisis that was undermining collegiate learning in the Berlin seminar was perceived as a blip with its method of resolution as a useable training tool. It was exceptionally well handled by the course

---

<sup>1</sup> In Jerome Bruner's terms, these are enactive, iconic and symbolic. Although posed developmentally and sequentially for early childhood, the terms have wider application.

<sup>2</sup> See Colley, H., Hodkinson, P. and Marshall J (2002) *Non-formal Learning: mapping the conceptual terrain*. A consultation report, University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Institute. Peter Hofmann is on record as acknowledging that the formal/non-formal distinction was of 'decreasing relevance' in TALE.

team who were never less than sensitive to the possibilities of emotions getting mixed up with cognition.

9. TALE took some of its more interesting risks in this area of the role of the emotions in learning. Although some of its moves, particularly voluntary activities directed by Diego Romera in revamped settings late at night involving the body-as-metaphor or non-Western alternative spiritual exercises were controversial, at least to this observer, they proved a major attraction. Certainly this relatively unorthodox (?) ToT activity added a distinctive frisson to the residential seminars. The occasions were conducted with due sensitivity, with some grounding in traditions of physical theatre, and in a way that carefully offset the risks by letting participants define their own comfort zone, but I would be worried about their use in non-expert hands. Nevertheless I accept the view of participants that these occasions were significant learning experiences.
10. There was consistent attention paid to participant-centred learning, what constitutes it and how it can best be achieved in settings that encourage peer learning. Although the TALE course team did not fully codify its views in this area, I believe that the collective thinking, led to some extent by Peter Hofmann, could if published in a refereed journal make a significant contribution to the analysis of learning theories in practice.
11. The members of the course team proved to be a talented, reflective and thoughtful group of tutors with highly relevant personal experience who worked exceptionally well together as a coherent and coordinated group, honing a shared philosophy and putting it effectively into practice. Given the model being developed, a further attempt to take core NFE principles and practices into advanced ToT, they were generally regarded (in a judgment including the evaluator) as an exemplary choice of a tutorial team, to the extent that one might wonder about TALE's easy transferability; innovative programs run the risk of being personality-dependant.
12. The mentoring, counseling and pastoral arrangements in TALE were excellent, subtle, non-directive and caring, with tutors showing a particular adeptness at supporting personal learning plans and advising the participants on their individual training projects (as well as handling adroitly the occasional personal crisis). To an extent the quasi-tutorial 'facilitating' input one might have expected in the LOFT forums had been redirected to this aspect of the work.
13. The competences that were addressed by TALE as a part of the identified professional profile of training competences were impressively modeled in the competences displayed by the tutors. This was particularly striking in the responsiveness to learner needs, the management of group dynamics for group learning, the design of learning experiences based on intercultural exchange, and the management of ambiguity and conflict resolution.
14. TALE attracted strong participant endorsement with many participants investing heavily, both emotionally and intellectually, in its PPD potential. Several were impressive in the volume of their contributions both online and in supporting the tutors in developing the agenda for the LOFT open day. Four participants applied successfully to go on to the MA EYS Short Course without a breathing space and others have seen positive developments in their career profile.

15. The participants' learning and training projects were of demonstrable high quality in conceptual and analytical as well as practical terms and there is strong evidence in a number of settings of local impact.

### **Potential shortcomings**

Whether or not TALE evidenced significant shortcomings rather than routine tensions and ambiguities is a matter of debate, but in my judgment the following problems have emerged:

1. There was some ambivalence in the arrangements for the governance of TALE with the patchy relations between the course team and the Steering Group being at times tense if not fraught, with its influence declining following a strong beginning. The brief for the Steering Group suggested more hands-on direction than actually occurred ('We were not a group and we did not steer' said Rui Gomes, not altogether in jest). One or two of the ideological fault lines between the two groups were never fully resolved, particularly over the need to specify foundational knowledge as content and whether the degree of participant choice offered was compatible with certification or its soft equivalent ('What can one be sure of getting from a TALE graduate?' was a pertinent question that never got answered). There was also some evidence of internal differences within the Steering Group, some of whom were keener than others in pressing on a reluctant course team a dated version of 'instructional design'<sup>3</sup> while at least one felt embarrassed at having to defend the team's quasi-fundamentalist position on 'self-directed' learning, which was applauded by another. These issues were exacerbated by the convention that the Steering Group met in private as individuals with no institutional mandate with the course team only 'in attendance' for specific items, so that negotiations were left to the educational assistants operating a kind of shuttle diplomacy. They performed this difficult task with aplomb, but as Annette Schneider observed 'the role was unclear'.
2. The aspiration to have designed TALE as a generic model for ToT provision, explicit from the time of the Lopez paper<sup>4</sup>, is open to a number of counter arguments. Firstly TALE evidenced idiosyncratic features both around its peculiar cultural ambience and its 'home grown' competence mapping that might be held to undermine its potential as a common denominator. Secondly some of the issues raised by TALE appear to require a radical re-think that needs to go beyond TALE, particularly in the areas of online pedagogy, the formal recognition of training competences and the extent to which traditional NFE values of choice and voluntarism need to be compromised in the conditions of advanced ToT. Thirdly there is an argument that innovations like TALE should be treated as divisible rather than a package, with any future TALE-inspired provision encouraged to cherry pick. Perhaps what the future most needs is a proliferation of models, letting all the flowers grow, with 'certificated' and 'non-certificated' routes.
3. TALE gave the appearance of being insufficiently alert to the legitimate aspirations of an under-rewarded occupational group to achieve professional status and recognition, or at

---

<sup>3</sup> See Ellen Wagner's 'e-learning technologies timetable' from her keynote address at E-Learn 2004; reprinted as figure 12 in Madiba, M. (2007) *Investigating Design Issues in E-learning* (University of Western Cape, SA (Ph.D. thesis: in press)

<sup>4</sup> Lopez, M. (2007) *Mapping Study for Stakeholders on European-Level Training*. Internal paper.

least showed a reluctance to drive the recognition debate in the direction of external recognition and the hope that externally validated trainer competences can eventually be brought within the European Qualifications Framework. The understandable difficulties arose from the view that such a move would traduce the ethos of NFE and reduce its distinctive quality, although it could be argued that advanced ToT is a legitimate exception. There is a need to address beyond TALE in a politically realistic way the conditions under which formal recognition might be achieved.

4. There was insufficient clarity or agreement concerning the possible role particular documents (the CIM, initial self-assessment, the learning plan) might play in relation to the questions of final assessment, validation and even recognition.
5. It was easy to discern in TALE a cult-like over-preoccupation with creating ambiance and a leaking of counter-cultural, resolutely spiritual or implicitly therapeutic discourse into educational settings that many would regard as inappropriate for such incursions<sup>5</sup>. On several occasions I had a strong sense that the sniffing out of 'emotional blocks' in the participants offered tutors the opportunity to practice the quasi-therapeutic skills of the NFE facilitator as a more comfortable role than knowledge-based tutoring, given the renunciation of instruction. The paradox, of course, is that this necessarily involves an asymmetrical encounter. Since TALE was widely perceived by the participants as offering tools and techniques that might be used down the line with disaffected or vulnerable youth, there is the risk that the techniques might be practiced by the untrained in inappropriate settings.
6. The assessment strategy, largely trapped in a limiting NFE ideology of self-assessment, was consistent but raised questions of appropriateness in terms of European trainers of youth trainers as an occupational group needing external validation in its bid for professional status. Although self-assessment no doubt has a supportive role to play in recognition, the necessary political consensus is not yet in place for an agreed solution to be currently feasible. TALE did not always move in the right direction: some of the core competences were expanded in a way that unhelpfully introduced multiple or opaque criteria, making rating more difficult: ('Devising, monitoring and evaluating group learning based on an understanding of learning as a social phenomenon'; 'Understanding and embracing the lifelong dimension of a self-awareness process' [sic].)
7. If the competences were 'core' or 'essential', why were the participants allowed to choose which ones they wanted to pursue?
8. TALE implicitly accepted and worked within the 'upward compatibility' argument put forward by Fennes and Otten, that training should reflect the pedagogical norms of the sector for which the training is being offered<sup>6</sup>; this strikes me as irrational: infant teachers in training are taught *about* but not *through* heuristic play. It could have the

---

<sup>5</sup> Not so, argued Peter Hofmann in response to this point ('We don't play around with spiritual or therapeutic traditions').

<sup>6</sup> Peter Hofmann also took issue with this judgment, declaring that upward compatibility was not a TALE goal, not least because 'the level of reflection would be different'. On the other hand a number of features of TALE, like the 'group building' exercises, the 'energisers' and the eagerness to treat manufactured physical proximity as a proxy for group cohesion, had clearly bubbled up from below.

effect of inhibiting TALE from evolving a different balance between so-called formal and non-formal methods than the one characterizing the youth sector as a whole.

9. In an earlier report I noted:

‘The LOFT is the laudable product of dedicated work, imaginative thinking and enthusiastic commitment by a talented group of NFE training experts pushing the edge of their comfort zone and becoming on-line as well as face-to-face curriculum developers. Although needing further development, these are early days and the LOFT is ahead of the curve’.

Sadly, the curve caught up. Although the LOFT between the residential seminars was the only vehicle of communication (beyond email, Skype and fortuitous meetings if geography permitted in nodal points like Istanbul) between the course team and the participants, the course team (although often online) curiously declined to ‘mix it’ in the discussion forums, and when they did post their contributions were not noticeably different in kind from those of the participants. This, coupled with the amount of front-loaded content on the LOFT and the general conditions of online asynchronicity, led to some rudderless discussions that lacked a guiding tutorial presence. Overall the problems of an effective online pedagogy were never satisfactorily solved.

10. There was a persistent antinomy in the LOFT between two competing roles, poisoning it uneasily between being the e-learning wing of a programme of study committed to ‘blended learning’ and a portal of first choice for accessing the European youth knowledge base, and its alternative manifestation as a peer-driven social network supporting a community of practice. If the latter how might it be mapped on to a typology of such virtual communities and their country cousins the social networking sites? This dichotomy at times makes the blended learning look like a blend of oil and water. Eventually, as noted above, the LOFT subsided into a near irrelevance.

## Recommendations

1. There is room to question the view that advanced level ToT should aspire to a generic model, whether or not TALE can be regarded as an acceptable template for future provision. I recommend that a number of complementary models might be taken further and the quest for uniformity abandoned. Such future offerings would bear a family resemblance to ensure continuity of tradition but might take different views on the appropriate mix of formal and non-formal methods. This would require a pragmatic rather than an ideological approach and any residual NFE fundamentalism might prove a limiting factor. In particular, there is room for greater attention to be paid in some future offerings to foundational knowledge and the teaching of specific skills or competences.
2. There is certainly room for a quality offering in a genre close to TALE as part of the mix. Indeed it is important that this continuity should be in place.
3. Plausible routes to the formal recognition of trainer competences in ToT need to be explored as a matter of urgency despite the inherent technical difficulties. Political consensus on the way forward is a necessary but not sufficient precondition of this. The task is a technical one that might advantageously be put out to outside tender, reconfiguring the ‘expert group’ first suggested by SALTO that never quite materialized

in TALE.

4. The bridge between NFE principles and Web 2.0 needs to be approached from both directions. It is too limiting to pose the question solely in terms of how the latter can be adapted to meet the needs of the former. Online learning is currently seen externally as a major arena for reconciling the best of formal and non-formal approaches to learning within an overarching constructivist epistemology.
5. The 'upward compatibility' argument should be rejected. There is no logical reason why advanced ToT should be constrained to echoing the pedagogical norms and cultural ambiance of the youth sector as a whole, although of course in TALE these features co-existed alongside a challenging level of reflection; Such methods and conventions were developed with the needs of other (often more vulnerable) clients in mind. Candidates for reappraisal include the principle of voluntarism, the insertion of 'energisers' to combat low attention spans, the almost pathological renunciation of instruction and the predisposition to limit individual assessment to lightly moderated self-assessment.
6. There is a pressing need to explore links, overlaps and potential continuities between ToT and Higher Education offerings e.g. the MA in European Youth Studies and similar offerings; and to persuade universities to legitimize access pathways either through formal recognition or APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) procedures so that movement between the sectors is made easier.
7. A follow-up study should be commissioned to assess the impact of TALE on the careers of its participants and on the work settings that sponsored them.
8. Stakeholders need to be aware that some of the ideological fault lines appear to be systemic for the sector. Nonformality's Andreas Karsten responded to an earlier draft of this report with the following observation:

'I am frustrated to see that the exact same three areas of shortcomings repeat themselves in every project of this kind: online pedagogy v. non-formal learning; nonformality of the sector v. need for professional recognition; emotional pseudo-therapy v. knowledge-based tutoring. I wonder whether there is enough ground to emphasize that these problems were already there during ATTE, and during ACTHRE, and now again during TALE -- do they never learn?'

My final recommendation is that these three issues should be systematically examined, initially in an exploratory manner by an expert pedagogical group before another major curriculum development in the training of trainers is attempted.

DJ January 2011



# A TALE Unfolded: Main Report

David Jenkins  
[Independent External Evaluator]

---

## Acknowledgements

An external evaluator necessarily occupies an ambivalent position on the fringe of the activity under review, professionally trying to locate somewhere between an honest friend and the knowledgeable spectator that 'it would be difficult to fob off'<sup>7</sup>. Although something of an unknown quantity in a field characterized by overlapping circles of mutual familiarity, I have always been treated with great courtesy and cooperation by the TALE course team who have unstintingly shared with me their many successes and occasional difficulties and made my fieldwork profitable as well as enjoyable. In thanking in particular the core team of Gisele Evrard, Peter Hofmann, Gülesin Nemutlu, Diego Marin Romera and Miguel Angel Garcia Lopez, I feel it appropriate to record the admiration and affection with which I came to regard them. Together and individually they have taught me a lot as well as being generous when I occasionally stepped out of line.

I am also grateful to the Steering Group for its guidance and support, and particularly those who responded as stakeholders to my questions concerning TALE in relation to its political and strategic goals, notably Hanjo Schild, Rui Gomes, Udo Teichmann and Daniel Nuijten. My thanks, too, to those 'cultural hybrids'<sup>8</sup> who occupied a heroic position straddling the Steering Group and the course team, experts all in shuttle diplomacy: Florian Cescon, Annette Schneider, Dariusz Grzemny and Marta Medlinska all offered me valuable insights from their double perspective.

I have had considerable support and encouragement from the two documentalists that have worked on TALE, Luis Pinto and Gabriella Civico. Both have shared with me personal insights as well as ensuring that TALE would be one of the most thoroughly documented programs in the training of trainers (ToT) field. My thanks are also due to many academics and researchers in the youth and evaluation fields I have used as sounding boards, notably my Genesis and MA EYS colleagues, Lynne Chisholm, Andreas Karsten, Helmut Fennes, Yael Ohana, Charles Berg and Howard Williamson.

Finally I must sincerely thank the TALE participant trainers who were impressive and delightful in equal measure and welcomed me to their midst, tolerating my idiosyncrasies and not minding the occasional sallies I made into their debates or my insistent daft questioning of sector norms. I am particularly indebted to members of my invited 'focus group', who gave willingly of their time and intellectual energy to support the external evaluation. The group comprised Musa Akgul, Myriam Brahmi, Adina Marina Calafateanu, Pablo Castiñeiras, Andrej Donets, Peter Dral, Mara Georgescu, Micah Grzywnowicz, Andreia Henriques, Nadia Karayianni, Tomasz Lubotzki and Sven Retoré. Thanks to them I have been able to gain deeper insights into learning paths within TALE, the processes of peer support and mentoring, and the local impact of their TALE experience. Coincidentally, four of them applied for the MA EYS Short Course as a natural extension of TALE and all four were accepted,

---

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Howard Becker for such a nice way of putting it.

<sup>8</sup> The literature on marginality sees the condition of cultural marginality as having positive and negative dimensions: on the one hand the ambiguities and dilemmas of marginal status, on the other the possibility of being cultural hybrids and change agents. See Jenkins, D. (1972) 'Curriculum Development and Reference Group Theory: Notes Towards Understanding the Plight of the Curriculum Developer as Marginal Man', E283 Open University.

against stiff competition.

Throughout the report comments by, or views of, participant trainers will be sometimes be attributed and sometimes unattributed. Where attributed, with permission, they will be referred to by their first names.

## Introduction

My initial bid for the TALE (Trainers for Active Learning in Europe) external evaluation contract opened with a quotation from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the chilling lines spoken by Hamlet's father's ghost:

"I could a TALE unfold... "

Luckily nobody followed up the youth-referenced quotation ("whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood... "). So the metaphor was perceived as apt and even adopted by the course team. Indeed 'unfolding' is what an evaluation tries to do: the word carries suggestions of opening out a map, revealing a hidden truth, or following up a story line – each a appropriate image.

I have also endeavored in this report to 'make the strange familiar and the familiar strange'. Although this formula began life as a tenet of romantic creativity it has been taken over as a truism familiar both to semiotics and program evaluation. Although the device – 'a tactic of surprise to banish distortion' – is intended to facilitate recognition it can have the opposite effect and I am under no illusion that this report will please all readers.

I previously submitted a number of interim evaluation reports of a broadly 'formative' nature aimed at supporting the TALE innovation in 'training the trainers' as a 'critical friend' who aspires to a truth-telling role at the same time as recognizing that an evaluator can claim no monopoly of understanding, not least because there are 'multiple sources of valuing as well as multiple grounds'<sup>9</sup>. The following reports have been tabled:

1. The initial statement ('I could a TALE unfold') January 2009;
2. Follow-up statement by the TALE evaluator (March 2009);
3. TALE curriculum description: a response April 2009;
4. TALE Interim external evaluation report (August 2009);
5. Towards blended learning in TALE (November 2009);
6. Towards blended learning in TALE: executive summary (November 2009);
7. Interim report to the TALE steering group (May 2010).

I am hopeful that versions of these might eventually find their way into the public domain.

This concluding report is 'summative', i.e. in line with the European Commission definition of the purposes of program evaluation as 'judging interventions according to results, impacts and the needs they aim to satisfy' (SEC (2000) 1051 26/07/2000). The external evaluation of TALE is also paradigmatically policy-related research and was set up in part to address the policy issues attendant upon TALE, specifically its implications for future action by all of the relevant stakeholders. I have tried to keep faith with this agenda. The report, however,

---

<sup>9</sup> See Stake, R. (2004) *Standards-Based and Responsive Evaluation*, Thousand Oaks CA. Sage.

needs to read in the context of parallel accounts, notably any internal evaluation products and Gabriella Civico's 'documental' account, published separately.

The availability of a comprehensive descriptive account of the TALE operation and experience acts as a potential check on the validity and reliability of all evaluative analysis and reduces the need for the external evaluation to include a wealth of descriptive data; this present account can in consequence be more selective in presenting data in support of its own analytical line of argument. There has also been some division of labour between the external and internal evaluations. The student questionnaires designed by the course team are sufficient for my purposes although I have reserved the right to comment on how they interpret the conclusions.

The report draws eclectically on several bodies of theory. In curriculum theoretic terms it draws on Stake's matrix defining what is eligible for collection in a 'whole countenance' evaluation<sup>10</sup>, linking the schema to Fennes and Otten's quality criteria for training programs in the youth field<sup>11</sup> and to Biggs' concept of 'constructive alignment'<sup>12</sup>, which in effect requires a consistency analysis of elements in a program of study. It also relates to the theory and practice of 'blended learning'<sup>13</sup>.

## Methodology

The negotiated and agreed evaluation approach is that of 'responsive evaluation'<sup>14</sup> which is broadly ethnographic and falls under the portrayal tradition, tending to use issues rather than objectives as advance organizers<sup>15</sup>. Ultimately a 'responsive' evaluator describes a program's activities and its issues, making summary statements of worth. But the predisposition to analyze merits and shortcomings is tempered by the need to 'recognize multiple sources of valuing as well as multiple grounds'. This involves collecting and acknowledging the judgments of participants and stakeholders in and around the program. As in all policy-related research, the emphasis is on 'social purpose linked to methodological and analytical rigor'<sup>16</sup>

The methods used in collecting and interpreting data were non-participant (and in a minor key quasi-participant) observation at the three residential seminars (although not

---

<sup>10</sup> See Stake R., (1967) 'The Countenance of Educational Evaluation', *Teachers College Record* 86, pp. 523 -540.

<sup>11</sup> Fennes, H. and Otten, H., (2008) *Quality in Non-formal Education and Training in the Field of Youth Work*. A study supported by the Youth Partnership and SALTO YOUTH.

<sup>12</sup> Biggs, J. (2003): *Aligning Teaching and Assessment to Curriculum Objectives*, Imaginative Curriculum Project, LTSN Generic Centre)

<sup>13</sup> Bonk C. and Graham C. [Eds.] (2006), *Handbook of Blended Learning*, Global Perspectives

<sup>14</sup> See Stake, R. (2002) "Responsive Evaluation: Core Ideas and Evolution", Special Edition of *New Directions in Evaluation*, Issue 92 pp.7-22.

<sup>15</sup> Although the approach here is eclectic, considering objectives (and competences) as well as issues.

<sup>16</sup> NCSR/Cabinet Office (2003), *A Framework for Assessing the Quality of Quality Research*, HMSO. Commissioned by the Strategic Unit of the Cabinet Office.

interpreted with the kind of strictness that would have turned the evaluator into a silent lurker), document analysis, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with key informants and stakeholders, and the use of a focus group of twelve participant trainers (a 'coalition of the willing'). I have also had access in draft to the 'documentation' of TALE and questionnaire data designed by the course team both mid term and at the conclusion of the program.

To some extent I felt it was appropriate to consider TALE to be as much a cultural artefact as an instructional system for learner-centred training and as such my methods at times moved modestly in the direction of cultural anthropology as proposed by writers like Clifford Geertz<sup>17</sup>. I have tried, particularly in commenting on the residential seminars, to employ the device of 'thick description'<sup>18</sup>.

My approach has also reflected 'grounded theory'<sup>19</sup>, but in a weak (compromised?) version in that there was no attempt to go into the fieldwork 'shorn of all theory' and the bottom-up progressive focusing has been tempered by a willingness to use tactically various theoretical frameworks as heuristic devices. I have also tried to use limited proxy indicators of ToT competence development where appropriate, although the political climate in and around the stakeholders resulted in a holding back of the across-the-board investment that needed to be made in this area.

Since TALE, like ATTE<sup>20</sup>, 'built the ship while sailing' it has not been possible to treat TALE as an experiment, since experimental method works by 'freezing the treatment'. However, I do not regard this as a weakness either in TALE or for the evaluation and the flexible 'organic' aspects of TALE became an important source of learning for the course team and lessons for the post-TALE era.

This report also acknowledges affiliation to a latent tradition of 'curriculum criticism'<sup>i</sup> that is predisposed to treating a program as an aesthetic object. This might be considered particularly appropriate for a program like TALE, which demonstrated considerable élan and maintained a distinctive style that was directed towards giving its educational encounters a frisson and ambiance that was at one level a quasi art form. There was an air of palpable excitement around TALE that your evaluator got caught up in and hopes to convey.

Another theoretical and methodological framework that is used in passing is 'fantasy theme rhetorical criticism' as developed by Ernest Bormann and explicated in Sonja Foss's (1996) edited volume *Rhetorical Criticism, Exploration and Practice*<sup>21</sup>. One potential hypothesis is

---

<sup>17</sup> See Geertz, C. (1975) 'On the nature of anthropological understanding', *American Scientist* Vol. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Geertz, C (1973), 'Thick description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture' in Alan Bryman and Robert Burgess, (1999) *Qualitative Research* (4 Vols.) London, Routledge.

<sup>19</sup> See Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, New York: Aldine. For present purposes I am ignoring subsequent theoretical divisions in grounded theory and stressing its bottom-up theory building and progressive focusing.

<sup>20</sup> See ATTE (Advanced Training for Trainers in Europe) Vol. 1 (2005) *Curriculum Description* and Vol. 2 (2006) *External Evaluation Final Report* (Chisholm, L. et al)

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 5, Foss, S. *op. cit.* The word 'fantasy' is used in a technical sense and does not carry its everyday connotations.

that the TALE community demonstrated Bormann's 'convergence theory' in their willingness to develop a shared and agreed sectarian narrative. There was also some use made of 'comparative' and 'normative' reference group theory<sup>22</sup> to explore the pattern of significant others (i.e. reference individuals) in the world of the participant trainers.

In writing up this report I have also been influenced to some extent by the 'new historicism'<sup>ii</sup>, which is a loose canon of practice rather than a 'method' and has to date been most influential in literary studies and art historical criticism, although its basic approach has also informed some work under the banner of 'curriculum criticism'<sup>23</sup>. In a slim volume titled *Practicing New Historicism*, Gallagher and Greenblatt demonstrate how the technique works. They focus on five central aspects of the new historicism: 'recurrent use of anecdotes, preoccupation with the nature of representations, fascination with the history of the body, sharp focus on neglected details, and a skeptical analysis of ideology'<sup>24</sup>. Each of these themes finds an echo in my account.

I am particularly grateful to my focus group of participants, members of which responded with a wealth of information that has deeply informed this report. The questions posed to them were as follows:

My request is in three parts. The first request is for some background information about you. I would be grateful to receive electronically:

1. Your curriculum vitae, with particular focus on what you have been doing over the last two years, connected or unconnected to TALE.
2. The name of your mentor and your permission for me to approach him or her concerning the mentoring process.
3. The name and email address of somebody I could approach locally who can testify to any impact TALE has had on your work in your home setting.
4. Your Training Project (if complete)
5. Any use you have made of the competence improvement map (CIM)

The second request is for 'critical instances'. Critical in this context means 'thoughtful and reflective' not 'negative', although naturally we are looking for honest accounts. Anecdotes are looked for in the following areas:

1. Moments of intellectual challenge, breakthrough or new insights
2. Collaborative working with peers
3. Effective or ineffective mentoring
4. Experience with the LOFT
5. Frustrations with people or circumstances
6. The experience of arranging and conducting your Training Project

Please try to make any anecdotes you offer a mix of description (narrative: what happened) and analysis (reflections, explanations and theories).

The third request is to ask you to comment briefly on controversial statements over which opinions are likely to be divided:

---

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Hyman, H. and Singer, E. (eds.) (1968) *Readings in Reference Group Theory and Research*. New York: Free Press, London: Collier-Macmillan Limited.

<sup>23</sup> See Willis, G. [Ed.] (1978), *Qualitative Evaluation: a Reader in Curriculum Criticism*. McCutchan

<sup>24</sup> Gallagher, C. and Greenblatt, S. (2000) *Practicing New Historicism*, University of Chicago Press.

1. That the pedagogy of non-formal learning remains a principled and coherent option for advanced 'training the trainers' programs like TALE.
2. That the LOFT was helplessly torn between its role as e-learning units on a program of study and its role as a social networking site.
3. That TALE made little significant progress in furthering the recognition of trainers in the youth field.
4. That in some respects TALE has suggestive similarities to a religious cult.
5. That the TALE team treated the participant trainers with a judicious balance between challenge and support.

It is important to stress that there is no obligation to respond to every question. Simply offer a quick response where you feel you have something to say. Finally, of course, if you have any additional comment you would like to make, please feel free to do so.

## Overall structure

The structure of *A TALE Unfolded* follows the seven thematic headings agreed with the Steering Group as a framework for the final external evaluation report. For a summary of the achievements and shortcomings of the TALE programme as perceived by the external examiner and specific recommendations and conclusions the reader is directed to the Executive Summary.

## The negotiated framework

This main section of the external evaluation report is largely structured by issues that were implicit in or through TALE and need in turn to be considered post-TALE with respect to analyzing the extent to which the underlying questions can be addressed or agendas moved on. Many of the issues are deep and complex and it would have been unreasonable to expect TALE to have offered once-and-for-all solutions.

### 1. The antecedents of TALE, political and educational

TALE comes with an interesting and complex 'back story', one that has several dimensions. Since much of this background has been more than adequately covered elsewhere<sup>25</sup> I concentrate on the most pertinent features that underpin substantive issues addressed in this report.

Post the Lisbon 2000 European Council<sup>26</sup> and the setting of the 2010 agenda, concerted efforts were made to bring non-formal education (NFE) within the political and economic aspirations for Europe as a dynamic knowledge economy. It was argued convincingly that this entailed extending the validation and recognition of learning to learning that takes place outside of the formal education system, including learning by disadvantaged or disaffected

---

<sup>25</sup> See for example Hopkins, B (2004) 'The Youth Sector and Non-formal Education/Learning', Report to the Council of Europe and the European Commission Youth Research Partnership. Also Chisholm L. and Hoskins B. (2005) *Trading Up: Potential and Performance in Non-formal Learning*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg. Also Lopez, M. (2008) *Mapping Study of European-level Training of Trainers* [a commissioned paper leading up to setting the parameters for TALE].

<sup>26</sup> Lisbon European Council 23/24 March 2000. See in particular Presidency Conclusions, Section 1: Employment, Economic Reform and Social Cohesion.

young people. The subsequent Copenhagen Declaration urged the development of 'a set of common principles' towards greater compatibility of the different recognition and validating approaches across Europe to take account of the variety of settings and circumstances in which learning takes place.

The Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport and the European Commission Youth Unit responded with a joint text on the validation of non-formal learning in the youth sector, looking to initiate activity towards both 'soft' recognition<sup>27</sup> and a better understanding of the quality standards applicable to NFE. Although arguing for 'greater complementarities' between NFE and formal education and training, the joint text echoed and endorsed some of the norms of the sector, particularly that learning should be 'self-organized', springing from 'intrinsic' motivation, whilst the enabling curriculum structures needed to be 'flexible'. Learning was seen as a 'collective process' needing to be pursued in a 'supportive learning environment' and in relation to which the assessment of individual success or failure was to be regarded as 'inappropriate'.

This line of argument would be particularly influential if TALE were implicitly to endorse the principle of 'upward compatibility' i.e. the view that even 'advanced' training of trainers for the youth sector should reflect the pedagogical norms of the sector e.g. as deployed in the sector's dealings with disadvantaged or disaffected youth<sup>28</sup> including a rejection of external validation. The question is whether these norms and this ambience should be a non-negotiable part of the fabric of programs like TALE as advanced<sup>29</sup> training courses. Not surprisingly, as elaborated below, a fractured discourse grew up around this issue in TALE, even among the course team. Nevertheless, the particular ambience of TALE needs to be understood against this background.

Other trends proved directly influential. There was also in the period leading up to TALE a determination to pursue the quality debate technically on three fronts: the first was to develop general quality criteria for organizations, events and their attendant conditions in the European youth field. This quest was unambiguously placed in the context of a values-driven European 'ideological project'<sup>30</sup>, with cross-border intercultural activity underpinned by the declared aspirant European values of respect, self-determination, social cohesion, anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, inclusiveness and participatory democracy. In the observed Europe, of course, many of these declarative values are honored in the breach and are perhaps better seen as candidates for principled promotion rather than statements of core

---

<sup>27</sup> 'Soft' recognition can be considered as public recognition acquired by informally generated public reputation based on the perceptions of various stakeholders, audiences and end-users in the absence of external validation.

<sup>28</sup> According to Chisholm in the ATTE Evaluation Report 'youth trainers' themselves traditionally 'use non-formal educational methods, focussing on personal and social development with an emphasis on fostering intercultural competence'.

<sup>29</sup> There is a perceived problem in the use of the term 'advanced' as it implies selection and breaches the principle of voluntary open access. Although this term was reduced in emphasis between ATTE and TALE the latter is unequivocally an advanced program.

<sup>30</sup> By the term 'ideological project' I mean a determination to establish a 'world view' based on projected values that are desirable but not universally held. By asserting 'European values' the strategy risks the perception that it is trying to establish something by pretending it already exists, a point made forcibly by Ralph at the Strasbourg Residential seminar.

cultural values. TALE proved itself exemplary in pursuit of this ideological project, with its values held by the course team at the deepest level and consistently informing their practice.

The second trend was an increasingly felt need, within the overarching quality framework, to specify quality criteria for activities falling under ToT (the training of trainers) and to propose the specification of a professional<sup>31</sup> profile of trainer competences. The canonical text for this exercise, which influenced TALE although it was never formally adopted<sup>32</sup>, became Helmut Fennes and Henrik Otten's (2008) *Quality in Non-formal Education and Training in the Field of European Youth Work*. This genuflected in the direction of a politically coercive framing statement, the European Commission's *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*, although Fennes and Otten wriggled a little to avoid the suggestion that post-Lisbon 'economic priorities' made youth work 'an instrument of labor market or economic policy'<sup>33</sup>.

Interestingly, the study put its own somewhat idiosyncratic gloss on some of the competences, for example competence in Mathematics and Science transmogrifies into a commitment to 'undogmatic reason bound by ethical principles'. Importantly, Fennes and Otten saw the profile as constituting a 'set' rather than a 'list' and made no attempt to indicate how it might be turned into a syllabus or a curriculum. Indeed it would not be difficult to argue that a competence profile is inherently unsuitable as a platform for curriculum development<sup>34</sup>. I address this issue later in considering how the TALE course team adapted and modified the competence profile and gave it a 'home grown' gloss.

The third front, which corresponded in time with the setting up of TALE, addressed the issue of the recognition of ToT by seeking to reappraise assessment strategies based predominantly on self-assessment. Part of the argument was that because assessment can also be treated as a proxy for evaluation in the 'psychometric' model<sup>35</sup> this had the effect of obscuring the public recognition of learning outcomes. TALE had originally been planned largely on the basis of the NFE norm of lightly moderated self-assessment, with all the

---

<sup>31</sup> As e.g. developed in ATTE.

<sup>32</sup> Gisele has asked me, quite reasonably, to confirm my understanding that the course team did not endorse the Otten/Fennes paper ('not the basis of TALE'), and indeed in some respects were critical of it. Neither was it ever 'officially adopted' despite SALTO backing and a specific request from the Steering Group that they should do so. My use of it is not, therefore, on the basis of whether TALE was demonstrating fidelity to espoused objectives or EC agreed standards but simply as an available set of external benchmarks.

<sup>33</sup> A small number of TALE participants led by Pablo saw a strong EC economic and social problem containment as a 'hidden curriculum' against which some traditional NFE and LLL nostrums like participant-centred learning were in danger of being bogus.

<sup>34</sup> A proposition given some support by Miguel Lopez. See also Jenkins, D. Karsten, A. Lobotzki, T. and Retore, S. 'Bread and Circuses: an Adversary's Account of the Use of Competency Frameworks for Trainers in European Non-Formal Education', 'round table' paper and performance piece given at the annual EERA conference, Helsinki 26-28 August 2010.

<sup>35</sup> This has been linked to a so-called 'agricultural-botany' model, as it is analogous to crop yield studies. See Parlett M. and Hamilton D. 'Evaluation as Illumination: A new Approach to the Study of Innovative Programmes' in Hamilton D. et al [Eds.] (1977) *Beyond the Numbers Game: a Reader in Educational Evaluation*, McMillan.



attendant problems of external credibility, but the course team's principled opposition to change weakened across time and some progress was made.

In response to this outside pressure, the Steering Group proposed appointing a technically proficient ad hoc 'expert group' to develop assessment criteria and proxy indicators based on competence profiling. The task, according to SALTO's Udo Teichmann, would then be to make a bridge between the European Commission eight competences of Lifelong Learning document and the 'aims and learning objectives' (sic) of TALE. The expert group would integrate experience from other contexts including feedback from SALTO and the Partnership network of researchers. In the event, an offer of SALTO funding was withdrawn on the grounds that TALE was off-message in developing a customized version of the competence profile. I was puzzled by this and asked around. Rui Gomes links it with what he felt to be a weakening of resolve by the European Commission and the Council of Europe ('from sincerely interest at the beginning to caution at the end'). This 'worry' [shift in attitude] 'contaminated SALTO's attitude towards the role of TALE in relation to the strategy... It may have been just be too much for what the institutional frameworks could cope with'. For whatever reason, the 'political' need was reassessed as a future consensual advance<sup>36</sup> that was to by-pass TALE.

There were further ambiguities of a different kind as expressed by Peter Hofmann:

'Are we looking for the recognition of TALE (as a model for vocational training) or of non-formal educators (having a certain competence profile) or a whole sector (non formal adult education? European youth work?)'

Another important and acknowledged antecedent were the ToT programs leading up to TALE, and commendable efforts were made by the Steering Group and course team to assess and incorporate their legacy, drawing on the excellent (2007) *Mapping Study for Stakeholder on European Level Training of Trainers* by team member Miguel Angel Garcia Lopez. The Lopez study examined systematically previous offerings, noting both diversity and synergies and charting challenges to quality and recognition. Various short courses under the auspices of SALTO<sup>37</sup>, the Directorate of Youth and Sport<sup>38</sup> and the Partnership<sup>39</sup> were drawn upon but the predominant influences proved to be those previous experiences where comparisons are more direct, the Partnership's Advanced Training for Trainers in Europe (ATTE) and the Youth Sports Division's Advanced Compass Training in Human Rights Education (ACT-HRE)<sup>40</sup>.

---

<sup>36</sup> See Otten H. and Ohana Y. (2009) *the eight key competences for lifelong learning: an appropriate framework with which to develop the competence of trainers in the field of youth work or just plain politics?* This piece of exegesis marginalises TALE as an ox-bow lake in the river of development and is insufficiently critical of its sacred text.

<sup>37</sup> For example the SALTO CD Short Courses in Cultural Diversity

<sup>38</sup> For example the Directorate of Youth and Sport's ToTHE: Training of Trainers in Cultural Diversity

<sup>39</sup> For example the Partnership's TATEM: Training for Active Training in Euro-Mediterranean Youth Work

<sup>40</sup> See the ACT-HRE evaluation study by Andreas Karsten (2007). The questionnaire was used as a basis for the final TALE participant questionnaire.

Rui Gomes felt that the Steering Group made more sense in the preparation and launching phase than in the implementation and evaluation phases:

‘It brought together the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum and SALTO Training RC in the same group, which was very important in order [among other things] to make sure that the political, administrative and financial means required for the course were in place and to provide realistic and effective guidance and support. Up to the first residential seminar, the thrust and results of the ‘steer’ were clear, important and actually crucial in defining the boundaries and aims of the course.

Later on, the role of the Steering Group became less clear and in any case more difficult to exert. Frustrations included different understandings of the educational approaches of the course (the reservations of the steering group were sometimes ignored), the role and method of the external evaluation and the role of the Steering Group itself. Towards the end of the course, there were few meetings and it was not clear what the Steering Group could decide upon’.

Although the TALE course team plausibly and with considerable evidence claimed to be ‘innovative’ and ‘risk-taking’ rather than ‘thinking as usual’, a balanced judgment would equally stress their determination to nurture and keep alive an established public tradition of NFE ToT that they perceived to be at risk. The consequences of this juxtaposed backward-looking orientation (described as ‘keeping the faith’) and its consequences are analyzed in some depth below.

The main Lopez recommendation was that, given ‘political willingness’, TALE should exemplify and embody the need for a ‘common strategy’ in ToT ‘to avoid redundancies’<sup>41</sup> and that it should also be unequivocally ‘based on the principles of NFE’, although in this respect he anticipated (as is his wont!) the emergence of elements of ‘creative tension’. This acceptance both of the need for a ‘professional profile’ for ToT (which was reworked to become the dedicated 18 TALE key competences) and the upward compatibility argument<sup>42</sup> had profound effects on the general ambiance of TALE as an educational milieu and psychological habitat.

The actual effects of these acknowledged influences were summarized above in the section on Achievements and Shortcomings, but it is also necessary to draw attention to three other background factors that have proved relevant. The first was that a sustained critique over the last decade of the circumstances of mass Higher Education<sup>43</sup> had led to a reemphasis in HE on ‘critical reading’ and a ‘constructivist pedagogy’, which has contributed to the collapse from above of the conventional distinctions between formal and non-formal approaches, so

---

<sup>41</sup> This was reflected in the background information that formed part of the *Conclusive Report of the Second Steering Group Meeting*, which stated that TALE ‘should constitute the first step towards the creation of a coordinated approach to training trainers in Europe’.

<sup>42</sup> The ‘upward compatibility’ argument is the view that the pedagogy of training the trainers should systematically reflect sector norms and not just reference them.

<sup>43</sup> See e.g. Scott, P. (1995), *The Meaning of Mass Higher Education*, Buckingham: SRHE, Open University Press.

that 'blurred genres' have become the norm<sup>44</sup>. Indeed analytical work<sup>45</sup> has amply demonstrated that 'formal' and 'non-formal' can no longer be considered as stable or coherent paradigms; the correct question is what balance between them is appropriate in particular contexts.

The second influence is that online or blended learning had shifted from being a subservient educational technology within a dominant 'instructional design' paradigm and was increasingly being seen as a site of potential integration/overlap between formal and non-formal approaches<sup>46</sup>. Yet, as we shall see, the compatibility between online learning and NFE pedagogical principles became an issue for the course team that neither the trainers nor the participants regarded as fully resolved.

The third challenge was that one of the sacred cows of NFE ideology appeared to be reaching the end of its milking life. The relatively unexamined orthodoxies of 'learning styles' theory<sup>47</sup> and its link to a 'self-directed' or 'participant-centred' pedagogy were attracting skeptical reappraisal both in conceptual and methodological terms. This debate was never seriously addressed in TALE although referred to in evaluation reports, and TALE continued to make unsubstantiated claims in this area<sup>48</sup>.

Nevertheless, an overall assessment would place TALE on the cusp of some important policy developments, adding weight to the need to assess its lessons and its legacy.

## **2. The TALE curriculum: its relevance, structure and the adequacy of its learning goals**

'The map and the territory were different'  
[Mara]

The following section analyzes and comments on the TALE curriculum, a task requiring some comment by way of introduction, so the reader is asked to forgive a brief introductory excursion into curriculum theory.

There is some historic disagreement over the scope of the term 'curriculum' which etymologically suggests a 'course' (literally for chariots) to be 'run' and has the pre-

---

<sup>44</sup> See Geertz, C, (1993) 'Blurred Genres: the Refiguration of Social Thought' Ch. 1 of *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, Fontana

<sup>45</sup> Colley, H., Hodkinson, P. and Malcolm, J (2002) *Non-formal Learning: Mapping the Conceptual Terrain*. Consultation Report, University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Institute.

<sup>46</sup> Madiba, M., (2007) *Investigating Design Issues in E-learning*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Cape, South Africa. See also Clark, R. and Mayer, R (2003). *E-Learning and the Science of Instruction: Proven Guidelines for Consumers and Designers of Multimedia Learning*. Pfeiffer.

<sup>47</sup> See Coffield, F. (2004) 'Learning Styles for Post 16 Learners: what do we know? University of Newcastle.

<sup>48</sup> Although it was never clear which of the competing models or the 4x4 dichotomies they spawned were being used.

specification of 'aims' and 'objectives'<sup>49</sup> as a usual requirement. Yet it can variously be designed and/or analyzed as syllabus, product or process. Classic definitions since the canonical work of Ralph Tyler<sup>50</sup> have tended to take a means-to-ends view (self-styled 'rational curriculum planning'<sup>51</sup>) and conceptualize a curriculum as a statement about intended learning outcomes, expressed in the strongest version of the model as the knowledge skills or attitudes students (or in the case of TALE 'participant trainers') will be able to demonstrate having completed a program of study. In this model, evaluation typically takes the form of psychometric testing to validate the learning outcomes, although declarative portfolios, simulations and other methods of demonstrating that the objectives have been achieved are not excluded.

Clearly TALE would barely qualify as a 'curriculum' at all under this rubric, for at least two reasons: Even if 'professional competence profiling' could be considered a proxy for 'properly formulated' aims and objectives, as it often is in European circles, technical difficulties notwithstanding<sup>52</sup>, in TALE the statement of 'essential' trainer competences was paradoxically treated as a smorgasbord not a set menu, with participant trainers free to decide which competences they wished to develop, thereby undermining the claim of essentialness<sup>53</sup>. The second reason is the incompatibility of a mandatory pre-specified curriculum with one of the edicts of non-formal learning, endorsed by the course team, that participants are offered autonomy over all aspects of their learning ('What do we understand by self-directed learning? In simple words you decide what you need and want to learn, when and how you want to learn it'). Moreover, with 'self-assessment' this freedom is extended to adjudicating whether they have learned it or not. Whether TALE was in a position to hold the line on this principle in the circumstances of advanced ToT is another question. Rui Gomes commented as follows:

'At several moments of the course I became skeptical about the NFE approaches as used and practiced, for example the emphasis on self-directed learning and having an initial self-assessment as optional.'

To see a paradox here is not to decry non-formal methods. Actually there are finesses to the argument that let the TALE course team off the hook to some extent, although we are left with inescapable tensions and ambiguity. The idea that a curriculum is irreparably a statement about aims and objectives, or needs to specify indicative content, has for some time been challenged from several vantage points, although it has to be said in passing that

---

<sup>49</sup> Both 'aims' and 'objectives' were defined technically in the model although TALE often collated (if not confused) them. In terms of curriculum design their relationship with 'competences' is ambivalent.

<sup>50</sup> Tyler, R., (1949) *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>51</sup> Means-ends determinism is not the only model of 'rationality' either in behaviour or curriculum design: e.g. Michael Oakshott's alternative view of rationality as coherence with the idiom of an activity, a view that sits comfortably both with curriculum development in the arts and NFE.

<sup>52</sup> Items in competence profiles are often too general, too dispositional or too unclear in how they might be taught to be an obvious plausible basis for program development.

<sup>53</sup> One of the course team argued that as TALE was explicitly part of a trainer's life-long learning process it was necessary to take a wider time frame.

the Steering Group have consistently given it at least weak endorsement<sup>54</sup>. Part of the counter argument is to recognize that the curriculum in the cupboard is not the curriculum in the classroom<sup>55</sup> and in many ways the 'real' curriculum is the one that can be inferred and analyzed from practice, which will include elements of a so-called 'hidden curriculum' going inadvertently beyond the intentionality of the program. TALE in practice was an impressive pragmatic compromise that made some of the tensions and ambiguities redundant.

A curriculum is more likely in the current intellectual climate to be seen as a 'multi-layered text'<sup>56</sup> with a number of facets open to the processes of design or analysis. There is a renewed interest also in the link between curriculum and pedagogy with teaching and learning processes being seen as important as outcomes in the specification. This line of argument plays into the strengths of the TALE experience and fits with the definition of curriculum adopted by this report, which is the one advanced by Lawrence Stenhouse:

'A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice'<sup>57</sup>.

Seeing curriculum as essentially a proposal for action that offers a set of values and principles for the selection of content and methods of teaching/facilitating as well as flexible guidelines for implementation sits well with TALE and by its lights, in spite of some inherent ambiguities, the TALE curriculum can without doubt be considered in general terms as relevant, well structured and adequate in its learning goals, although as we shall see there still are a number of paradoxes and accommodations worth noting.

## Relevance

The TALE curriculum can be judged relevant because it not only meets a felt need for aware and trained European level trainers in the youth field but has done so with courage and élan and has attracted an exceptionally high level of participant and stakeholder endorsement, particularly from National Associations and sponsors in the 'country' settings who have eloquently commented on the impact 'back at home'. It has contributed quality 'graduates' to the pool of European trainers with a European inter-cultural orientation who have demonstrated their worth in practical settings; virtually all the training projects and personal learning projects I have seen, mostly but not entirely from members of my focus group, were highly commendable achievements that were indicative of the level of intellectual and mentoring support that the course team made available.

TALE qualifies as exemplary best practice for a particular genre of ToT grounded in NFE principles as interpreted by the course team for the context in which it was operating. Even if one were hesitant in seeking to universalize the model, it seems clear that this kind of

---

<sup>54</sup> In February 2009 the Steering Group expressed 'concern' that the TALE curriculum 'is sometimes focussed more on form than on content' and requested that 'for each feature a list of key learning content' should be developed. There was some movement in that direction but it never became a TALE priority.

<sup>55</sup> And also in educative settings not qualifying as 'classrooms'.

<sup>56</sup> See Pinar, W. and Reynolds, W. (1994), *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text*.

<sup>57</sup> Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*.

program deserves a secure role in any future mix, and TALE has reaffirmed its value.

### **Structure**

The curriculum can also be adjudged well structured both in design and execution (given the mild ambiguities referred to above) and has been rich and diverse in its use of multimodalities. The residential seminars were a judicious mix of non-formal and quasi-formal methods within a broadly 'facilitating' pedagogy. There was a pleasing embracing of artistic idioms, oblique approaches through metaphor, physical theatre, group activity, fervent discussion and supported reflection. The management by the course team was flexible and responsive and the quality of interaction very high. There were consistent efforts to build upon the experiences and analytical abilities of the participant trainers, increasingly so as the seminars progressed, and they were also given a certain amount of control over content.

The LOFT was a brave and innovative attempt to bring together NFE and online learning and might well have succeeded had not a decision been taken, probably by default, that attendance at the residential seminars was obligatory but engagement with the LOFT a case of NFE voluntarism. In Shakespearean language, this was 'the gap through which ruin entered' and most of the difficulties experienced in the LOFT can be placed at its door. There were also some teething troubles around its platform as a virtual learning environment and it never achieved consistent reliability ('towards the end I could not even access my own Kitchen Corner'). Various attempts to rescue the LOFT by redefining its function were unable to halt its decline into what one participant trainer described as its 'final irrelevance'. Others claimed that it offered a serendipitous usefulness, a source of sudden or spasmodic goodies, like a bran-tub. This issue and its implications for any post-TALE adaptation of the model are important.

Nevertheless it would not be amiss to treat the LOFT as a design success with flaws. A huge amount of effort was put into developing it and its overall architecture was imaginative and insightful. Its experiments with synchronous online exploration (the LOFT Open Days and the 'teatimes' leading up to the Berlin residential seminar) were successful once the technical blips were overcome. Many of the readings and activities were thought-provoking and a minority of participant trainers got a lot out of it, showing what it might have become had the course team either made it obligatory or had been able to sell it. I personally hope that the arranged marriage between NFE and online learning will not be not abandoned on the grounds that the families belong to different castes.

The mentored practical activities undertaken by the participant trainers in their training projects were a huge and unqualified success and in many ways gave an overarching coherence to the curriculum design, not least in giving the competence improvement map (CIM) something to bite on.

### **Declared learning goals**

Although in general TALE can also be regarded as at least adequate in its declared 'learning goals' there are two issues in this area that might persuade one to withhold a full ringing endorsement. The first is that TALE, following the Lopez report, represented itself as a move in the direction of a generic model for future 'common practice'. This raises the bar somewhat, and my own view is that the TALE learning goals (with their implicit theoretical compromises in the contested area of curriculum description) were right for TALE but should not be encouraged to legislate for the field. My main problem with the TALE learning goals

as a generic statement for generalized ToT is that they underplay the value of both foundational knowledge and specific focused skills training. I also have a longstanding (if currently heretical!) agnosticism about the ubiquitous use of 'competence frameworks' as a basis for curriculum development in the absence of 'properly formulated' program objectives<sup>58</sup>.

Nevertheless, as noted in an earlier evaluation report, the original TALE curriculum specification was a very professional attempt to negotiate a theoretical minefield. It offered in Parts II and III a convincing account of the various 'course elements' (the residential seminars, the LOFT<sup>59</sup>, the training projects and personal learning projects) together with a number of support features including individual mentoring by the course team and arrangements for peer learning.

Yet, by some standards, features one might have expected in a curriculum description were either absent or alluded to indirectly in an opaque kind of way, subsumed under the emphasis on process. There was an up-front commitment to the principal 'valued features' of NFE in the youth field, personal development, learning in groups and interactive participatory and experiential learning in relation to which the course team wanted to retain a tactical responsiveness. My general impression of the TALE curriculum was that it was like a recipe in the hands of expert cooks, there to be followed but not slavishly and with a certain amount of improvisation treated as normal.

### **The course elements**

The structure of TALE was in effect a question of achieving balance between the main 'course elements' of the curriculum, the residential seminars, online learning in the LOFT and the training and personal learning projects. The issue of whether the course elements added up to 'blended learning'<sup>60</sup> is one that requires retrospective adjudication. In the view of Gabriella Civico, who is knowledgeable in these matters, the course elements were insufficiently coordinated to qualify, with the LOFT never fulfilling its potential.

### **The residential seminars**

#### *Introduction*

The three residential seminars were at the heart of the TALE curriculum offer to the participant trainers and were intense concentrated experiences of an appropriate length pleasingly held in a variety of evocative locations, Strasbourg, Berlin and Budapest. The

---

<sup>58</sup> The TALE Curriculum Description paid patchy tribute to the objectives model, probably in response to the Steering Group, but Section 2 blurred the standard distinction between aims and objectives. General statements of competences, e.g. 'that students might competently plan implement and evaluate European youth training activities' were not broken down into highly specific learning objectives and no relevant theoretical models were proposed. Evaluating FE provision is not a skill that lends itself to development through unsupported peer reflection. It is not hard to see this helpful vagueness as linked to the NFE renunciation of instruction and the commitment to a form of learner-determined curriculum.

<sup>59</sup> The LOFT stands for 'Learning Opportunities For Trainers'.

<sup>60</sup> Typically defined as a judicious mix of methods and modalities in supporting learning including online and face-to-face. See Graham, C. (2005) 'Blended learning systems: definition, current trends and future directions' in Bonk, C and Graham, C. *Op. Cit.*

accounts below are selective in their detail and there is some attempt both at 'thick description'<sup>61</sup> and honoring the thematic concerns of 'the new historicism'<sup>62</sup>, particularly the emphasis on neglected detail, the crisis of representation, the body as metaphor, and the need to take a skeptical view of ideology.

The course team handled all three seminars with an impressive collective social style, intellectual resourcefulness and considerable interpersonal skill, most notably when they expertly calmed potentially mutinous elements in the crew at the Berlin seminar during the obligatory NFE group emotional crisis (see below). They remained faithful to their view of learning as involving whole human beings whose emotions and cognition are intertwined and who learn best in settings where the 'tutorial' role is to support and facilitate peer learning in groups; the excellent relationships within the course team, based on mutual respect and playing to each others strengths, added example to precept. The 'core' course team of Diego, Gisele, Gülesin, Miguel and Peter all attracted affection as well as respect. As Miguel put it:

'We had a] calm first phase of preparation, a good solving of initial conflicts and in moments of stress or shortcomings a big respect and mutual support... just a good mixture... with a common attitude of "no need to show who we are"'.

Although for various reasons including short-term contracts, job promotions and maternity leave, the educational assistants to the Partnership who straddled the Course team and the Steering Group had a shifting membership. Nevertheless Florian, Annette, Dariusz Grzemny and Marta all made their mark with hands-on contributions at the residential seminars as well as acting as the eyes and ears of the Steering Group, probing the philosophy and displaying different degrees of watchfulness towards the external evaluation. Efforts were made to secure continuity, for example by Annette who wrote a critically reflective briefing paper for Dariusz.

In the core and extended course team, a judicious and consistent sharing and distribution of roles was also apparent. In all three seminars there were rich and varied group activities and the learners had recourse to the full range of methods of internal model making: symbolic (words and theoretical frameworks), enactive (playful, simulations and gaming, theatre or 'body' based) and iconic (representational e.g. individual or collective mind maps). It was also notable that while the tutors kept direct instruction to a minimum, all were talented at offering explanation and analysis, although often doing so with a suppressed sheepishness as if it were an illicit activity.

The emotional trajectory of the three seminars resembled two exhilarating mountain peaks with the period leading up to the Berlin seminar as a dark valley between.

### *The first residential seminar*

The EYCS (Strasbourg) hosted the first residential seminar and not unexpectedly the main concerns were to welcome the participants as an intercultural working group, introduce the

---

<sup>61</sup> See methodology section above and Geertz, C. (1973) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>62</sup> See methodology section above and Gallagher, C. and Greenblatt, S. (2000) *Op. Cit.*



program in terms of a competence profile<sup>63</sup> for trainers in the youth sector, and explain the terms of engagement between tutors and 'participant trainers'<sup>64</sup>. The course team began where they intended to go on, seeking consistently to honor and preserve a tradition of radical NFE practice based in part on discourses about disaffection and youth alienation. From the beginning, too, there was a calculated use of bodily closeness as a proxy and transparent bid for group harmony with an initial 'bonding' exercise that produced a pyramid of stacked apprehensive bodies facing a battery of cameras. To be honest, I had to suppress unhelpful thoughts of comparable images that had recently been indelibly etched on the public imagination. Throughout the seminar a number of 'icebreakers' or 'energizers'<sup>65</sup> were interjected or encouraged from time to time, some quite curious like the Talers<sup>66</sup> pretending to be chickens or raunchy celebrities ('Ooh, aah! Let me see your Britney Spears') and there was the standard use both of engineered physical proximity and occasional expletives to reduce social distance between the participants.

With respect to constructive alignment<sup>67</sup>, the teaching and learning strategies were in general consistently and expertly applied, and coherent with the values and goals of the program as specified, particularly its commitment to the methods of non-formal education. The tutoring, both face-to-face and online, was non-directive with a strong tendency to renounce instruction in favor of a facilitating role; the tutors came across as skilled, knowledgeable and experienced with a range of activities that was both flexible and imaginative. A variety of (at times amusing) strategies was on display as the tutors sought to avoid the odium of the podium.

Training at this level surely requires tutor input if trainers are to negotiate a discourse gradient between the everyday, the applied, the theoretical and the critical, a journey it would be difficult to facilitate in TALE without blurring further the distinction between formal and non-formal methods<sup>68</sup>.

The theoretical justification for a competences matrix was presented exceptionally well, although a minority of participants was puzzled and irritated by its apparently coercive quality; had they not been offered control over content? ('You decide what you need and want to learn and when and how you want to learn it'). Many of the competences were impressively taught by example as well as precept. The outstanding achievements were in the *facilitation of group learning* and *intercultural learning*. The trainers came across as

---

<sup>63</sup> The TALE course team spent considerable time and energy in developing a 'home grown' competence framework and it was at times unclear whether this was intended to be situation-specific for TALE or generic for ToT in the youth field in spite of the absence of a mandate.

<sup>64</sup> The word 'student' was declared illicit and on one occasion the evaluator chided for inadvertently using it in a report. This curious ideological imperative carries cultural consequences that are more double edged than the course team realised.

<sup>65</sup> These ubiquitous cameo events struck me as often footling, although I have not been able to persuade either the course team or my 'sounding board' (Andreas Karsten) that they are ripe for review.

<sup>66</sup> 'Talers' was what the participant trainers voted to call themselves.

<sup>67</sup> See methodology section and Biggs, J (1995) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>68</sup> See Macken-Horarik, M. (1967) 'Relativism in the politics of discourse' in Muspratt, S. Freebody, P. and Luke, A. (eds) *Constructing Critical Literacy: Teaching and Learning Textual Practice*.

skilled and expert cross-cultural group facilitators, and were convincing role models. Very strong was the *facilitation of individual learning* with a high quality of pastoral concern for individual students.

Other competences were either compromised or only weakly applicable. Several competences, together with their associated 'abilities', appear best 'caught rather than taught'. This is particularly true of *communicative competence*, the *competence to motivate* and *competence in a team situation*. All one can reasonably claim is that the tutors demonstrated and encouraged these qualities, but they should hesitate before making claims of causality. Participant *evaluation* activities were largely imaginative and expressive rather than analytical. The floor group artwork 'evaluation of TALE' came straight out of the primary school classroom but attracted the same kind of unearned praise from the tutors that was given to the stilted doggerel poems honoring the LOFT.

The *competence to self-direct one's learning* might be seen as largely rhetorical, a residual commitment from non-formal principles developed for other contexts. The circumstances under which TALE had been set up made it redundant, except in the sense that all learning needs a 'signed up' learner and most curricula offer tactical choices within a defined framework. It soon became clear that the participants were beginning to realize the extent to which the overall framework was a given; they had traded in large chunks of autonomy by joining the program.

*Critical thinking* is a high level skill in decline. It is perhaps most likely to flourish in settings where skepticism is a cultural norm, treating every proposition as an invitation to doubt. This was a country mile from the culture of TALE, which behaved at times like a faith group. Naturally one or two of the participants demonstrated a quizzical and skeptical cast of mind, most notably Peter who could be sharply sardonic about some of the unexamined truisms on display.

Other competences development where a dogmatically 'participant centered' approach might do a disservice are *competence to design educational programs* and *competence to integrate evaluation*, both of which require considerable foundational knowledge and theory as a precondition of making sensible choices. Neither was seriously addressed in the first residential seminar.

The emphatic 'interpersonal' emphasis that ran through TALE resulted in the final session being choreographed into a creepy farewell ceremony that had us all lined up to pass by each other in moving columns (think football teams meeting and greeting each other but in excruciating slow motion) and expected to make little affirmative speeches. One participant grasped me by the shoulders and said, 'I will never forget meeting you here, Peter'. A triumph, one might say, of form over substance.

#### *The second residential seminar*

The rites of passage back into a residential phase of TALE involved opening and reading the 'messages in a bottle' posted at the first residential seminar (not universally embarrassing although there were some tacky moments) and an 'eyes tightly shut' tour of the building orchestrated by Dariusz Grzemny (who had taken over from Annette Schneider) where an archaeology of sounds ('refreshing memories'), breathing exercises ('the heartbeat of TALE'), anguished cries from a previous psychodrama ('what the fuck!') and choreographed hand-holding re-united the group. Participants were later asked to depict graphically their paths

through the interim period ('a map in groups of the TALE road'). The dominant image that emerged was of a mountain peak followed by a slough of despond.

In facilitating learning, the tutors at the second residential seminar again had recourse to a full-range of methods of internal model making, enactive, symbolic and iconic with a strong emphasis on building collaborative pictorial images and mind mapping as a means of trying to grasp and understand complex realities. But it will be remembered for a pivotal occasion on which the team abandoned the team script to rescue a difficult situation.

The narrative of TALE over the period up to and including the second residential seminar is easy to summarize. TALERS came to Berlin with a crisis in confidence following uncertainty about the strength of the TALE community following the inability of the LOFT (as TALE online) to sustain or replicate the excitement and elation felt during the first residential seminar in Strasbourg, and uncertainties surrounding the viability of the peer trios. The extent of the disenchantment took everybody by surprise and it was beginning to erode the group dynamics. The education team managed to turn the situation around (think that plane landing on the Hudson) by a combination of a skilled focused intervention and throughout the seminar energetically adapting the program and progressing plans for TALE's future. In my view the pivotal event of the seminar showed non-formal face-to-face pedagogy at its expert best, attuned to both intellectual and emotional nuances in group learning. It showed a working commitment to one of the core principles of the TALE methodology:

'We will provide space for 'here-and-now' methodology. We are convinced that everything that happens during the course can be potentially a source for learning about training. For this reason we aim to promote occasions to observe and reflect on processes and events within the team as well as within the group as a whole'.

Accounts of the disenchantment varied but several participants had simply not warmed to TALE online and were beginning to question its assumptions, suspecting it of traducing core NFE values. Others who had contributed considerable time and effort felt that they had been rowing in the middle of a boat with too many no-shows or passengers ('pissed off', wrote one). Their online posts had somehow got lost in the ether, seemingly not meriting a reply. It was only in the occasional setting up of online forums that offered synchronicity (LOFT 'open days', the 'teatimes' and the later 'Jack Daniels' sessions on Skype) that many regained their psychological sense of 'connection'.

Three other broad themes explored at Berlin contributed to the growing general sense of unease. The first was the extensive unresolved discussion on whether TALE/LOFT qualified as an embryonic or exemplary 'community of practice'. The second theme was the issue of 'recognition' and 'certification' both in TALE and NFE in the youth sector. This opened up fault-lines in the group in a way that reflected the ambiguities of the wider debate, in relation to which the course team could be seen not to have a single position (Sven responded to one of the team declaring that in TALE 'certification is a very minor issue' by demanding to know 'the official position', but of course there wasn't one). Thirdly, a forced change in the program for logistic reasons resulted in the planned exploratory 'research' visits to various educational and cultural organizations in Berlin being dropped, occasioning general disappointment.

At this point the less diligent online contributors raised the emotional temperature, feeling that they were being personally criticized ('I felt judged') and not 'shown respect' (both behaviors register high in the 7 deadly sins of NFE orthodoxy). In the judgment of the course

team, strong action was needed to rescue the social dynamics of the seminar from lurching into the pathological, and a high-risk strategy was put into place to address the issues directly; a blood-letting session was therefore inserted into the timetable.

This began with soft singing in different pitches followed by a (hopefully tongue-in-cheek) superstitious ritual that pressed multiculturalism to its outer defensible limit; the Talers were enjoined to hold hands in a dance/chant asking 'the gods' to intercede and bring 'good spirits to TALE'. Following this mood music, the tutors offered feedback from the 'intense reflection groups' that had alerted them to problems in the social cohesion of the group. The feedback had indicated that the tutors themselves needed to be 'more supportive of work in groups' as well as in facilitating online discussion. More importantly, a major problem had emerged in 'the dynamics of the group as a whole', partly due to 'people being at different stages of development'. At this point the education team played its trump card, Peter Hofmann with the NFE equivalent of bell, book and candle.

Peter offered a further diagnosis of why the group dynamics was 'polarizing us into fragments'. It was clear that a significant minority were 'in a bad place' and that the disenchantment was spreading ('like a virus, but I am not suggesting illness here'). It was limiting the ability of the some participants to 'support each others' learning', with the team 'not seeking to escape it own responsibility'. In a 'culture that does not allow confrontation' what was needed was a 'solution-based approach to solving the problem'.

This involved participants placing themselves bodily on an imagined continuum across the floor of the room according to the extent to which they felt 'affected' by the issue. The line was divided into three groups. The 'most affected group' were asked to describe 'what is happening' and their feelings towards it. The middle group was then to offer an analysis, following which the 'not affected' group was required to propose a solution. The assumption was that affected groups are too 'emotionally blocked' to easily find solutions but that a middle group can achieve some emotional distance. It is then up to the 'unaffected' group to turn this mediating statement into concrete proposals.

The issues raised were on several fronts. There was irritation at what had been the dispiriting level of minimal or non-participation on the LOFT ('although we need to respect withdrawal') on which the traffic was seen by one heroic contributor as 'fragmented and disconnected'. The balance between 'self-directed' individualized learning and a common whole-group commission had become over-skewed towards the former. Some felt that there was a residual digital or language divide that was experienced as inhibiting, others that there was a lack of facilitation for intercultural exchange.

The middle group in truth did not offer much by way of analysis, except in the interesting point that the market for trainers placed Talers in competition with each other, resulting in watchfulness and petty jealousies; in general they restated the problems more moderately rather than offering 'perspective'. They also endorsed the NFE truism that groups needed to feel comfortable about 'exploring their feelings'. In terms of the dynamic of the event this middle group initiated the move towards simple exhortation ('why cannot we just enjoy and share and not be afraid?').

This plea was picked up by the third group when Peter asked for 'concrete proposals'. Participants were enjoined both to 'accept responsibility' for their own learning ('don't expect the trainers to lead you from A to B') but also to be willing to accept responsibility for group learning. The redefinition of the problem as people indulging in behavior that was

inhibiting the learning of *others* clearly struck a cord by appealing to foundational NFE values. Many of the suggestions came out of a tradition of group therapy, encouraging participants to engage positively with 'challenges', accept 'responsibility', and work through difficulties as opportunities for 'growth', recognizing a collective commitment to 'inter-cultural sharing'.

These solutions (unlike the problems) were codified on a flip chart and were turned into a manifesto-cum-contract that individual participant trainers were invited (quite literally) to 'sign up to' by placing a dot against each statement, thereby claiming 'ownership' of the solution. Most Talers declared the exercise to have been valuable ('I liked the honesty and clarity of the exercise') and useful ('very hopeful: could be the beginning of the road back'). Only a few troubled intellects continued to question the logic of the exercise ('the assumptions don't line up... it is a sterile bypassing of the issues'). Another participant saw the therapeutic and the educational agendas as bifurcating ('I was frustrated by the competitiveness that emerged in Berlin. It was a destructive emotional situation that turned into a group psychotherapy session but not a learning one').

I am in general a bit suspicious when the dynamics of a group becomes its subject matter but on this occasion the intervention struck me as well judged. One of the participant trainers exclaimed, 'That is a method I could use in my own setting' but my view is that, like the psychodrama edge of forum theatre, it is only safe in expert hands.

Yet by redefining the problem as an inadvertent 'failure to support the learning of others' rather than one of participants feeling aggrieved that their own needs were not being made, the team had contrived a subtle shift in the rules of reconciliation. With few dissenting voices (although with one or two detecting sleight of hand) the Talers signed up to the new deal. Moreover, in general the solution stuck so that by the end of the residential seminar harmonious relations were restored and the final carnival/party of the Talers was as convivial as at Strasbourg.

This interestingly episode fitted a line of argument in Aristotle's theory of comedy in which catharsis takes the form of the emotional purgation of envy (not of fear, as in tragic catharsis). According to Richard Jango 'comic catharsis is useful in order to achieve the middle as virtue'<sup>69</sup>, as indeed occurred, almost literally.

Nevertheless a number of Talers reported critical incidents of a very positive nature at the second seminar. Sven remembers having had a stimulating nightly discussion about manipulation, the ethics of facilitative 'steering' and how to balance the power relationship between trainers and participants on a training course. Several participants made important contributions based on their own experience.

### *The third residential seminar*

Once again there is no attempt at balance in the description, as the aim is rather to concentrate on vivid detail in a series of cameos or vignettes. This is partly to avoid repetition of Gabriella Civico's 'documentalist' account, partly to keep faith with my

---

<sup>69</sup> Janko, R. (1984) *Aristotle on Comedy*. Perceptively Peter Dral described the occasion as a 'facilitated cathartic process'.

declared method. Some significant events are not discussed here, particularly the use of physical theatre methods, which are fully discussed elsewhere.

On the other hand it is pertinent to record that some element of disagreement emerged about the use of such methods in the context of the TALE flirtation with alternative therapies. Responding to an earlier draft of this report, Krisztina first took me to task for my comments on the cult aspects of TALE that made her 'feel offended as a movement therapist aware of the cognitive and research-based background to the use of emotions through bodywork'<sup>70</sup>. She did, however, contradict Peter Hofmann's statement that 'we don't mess with minds' by recalling an incident that she regarded as inappropriate:

'During the trance dance in Berlin one participant trainer went into a mental state that was ignored and neglected. I was approached by several of them asking for support during and after the session.'

In the overall narrative, the final residential seminar in Budapest represented a further handover of the agenda to the participants and had an increased focus on the training and personal learning projects. Its general tone was quiet and contemplative underpinned by a collective sense of achievement. It opened with a welcoming circle on the floor with participants invited to share 'what had been remarkable', in the manner of those 'testimonials' of believers organized in Welsh chapels by manic street preachers, and ended with a curiously elaborate invented ritual in another circle to celebrate the demise of TALE, mourn, weep, resolve, smile and achieve closure.

At the beginning of the residential seminar, there occurred what was widely agreed to be a somewhat unnecessary 'group building' exercise (billed with corny wit as 'a constructive experience') with the participants asked to improvise in one of the seminar rooms a tent-like structure out of bits, bobs and pieces of string. The resulting edifice hovered uneasily as an emblem somewhere between a progressive infant classroom and Gadafi's desert boudoir. This double association of childishness and dalliance brought out the worst in some Talers. The floor of the den was decorated with mushrooms and shells as if in some Freudian dream sequence, and saucy sociograms of a speculative nature were pinned up in the corridor outside<sup>71</sup>. There was, however, a nice redeeming irony as 'rules' borrowed from NFE orthodoxies were parodied for the setting ('Whoever comes to your room is the right person'; 'What goes on in here remains in here').

The third seminar also involved stakeholders and key people in the youth field. Antje Rothmund gave a thoughtful history of the EYCB and mapped the history of European youth policy and projects against it. She identified the challenges posed to training as a need to address societal changes in terms of declared European values. Some interesting issues were raised in discussion (Tomasz asked how the sector could move away from event-orientated funding). Yael Ohana and Peter Wootsh gave contributions offering networking opportunities as well as expert outside perspectives, and towards the conclusion of the seminar Steering Group personnel not only turned up but offered individual surgeries. They were welcomed wittily by the participants in an allegorical sketch in which the abashed

---

<sup>70</sup> If I gave the impression I was against physical theatre in NFE that was misleading. I have for several years worked closely with a Laban trained movement specialist in UK primary schools.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Hofmann objects to the inclusion of this incident in the report on the not altogether unreasonable grounds that it has nothing to do with the evaluation of TALE.

guests were offered literal jugs of water and exotic plants as an invitation to provide succor to stimulate growth (i.e. fund the participants' own endeavors).

The participants were clearly hoping for some continuity beyond TALE and confirmation that the reputation of the program was such that it would stand them in good stead, but I read elements of caution in the responses. Udo Teichmann reaffirmed the political need for a European generic competence profile for trainers but stopped short of saying that TALE's progress in that direction had been game changing. Nevertheless, he suggested, a TALE certificate would enhance a job application. Hanjo Schild argued that the issues needed to be looked at from the wider perspective of the political process while Rui Gomes confined himself to posing the generic question ('when we appoint anybody we want to know that this person can do the job. Where is that confidence to come from?') Daniel Nuijten had had some previous experience of meeting TALE participants and clearly enjoyed the further conversations.

Peter Hofmann's introduction had accurately summarized the seminar as about a final opportunity to share ('being resources to each other') before 'achieving closure'. In order to link sharing with personal development ('quality time for reflection') a series of exchanges in small groups of four or five participants was encouraged under the umbrella title of COPA (Community Practice in Action). Bids and 'posts' on a flip chart timetable gave the activity a flavor of self-direction. By day 3 COPA training projects up for critical review were supported by 'questions that may help you' (outcomes/indicators; trainers own learning; challenges and adaptations; the theory/policy/practice triangle, etc.) and some thought was being interjected on the methodology of collective reflection and meaning making. Rather quaintly, and with what I judged to be a deliberate use of a conventional religious metaphor, this was called 'harvesting'.

The participants' presentations were extremely interesting and wide-ranging from Mara and Olga on facilitating learning to Pablo and Anne on intercultural competence. I sat in with Micah, Mara and Terri as they raised and debated interesting generic issues concerning communications, feelings, flexible delivery and strategies for resolving in-team issues. Andrei and Peter had some nice ideas on the need for continuous PPD (a 'never-ending learning project' committed to successive iterative cycles'). Myriam showed how cultural and social differences can challenge in a variety of contexts and that the recognition debate has a local edge. Overall one had the impression of well-informed discussants making thoughtful links between practice, policy and theory.

There was one development at the third seminar concerning which I must confess a personal disappointment. My original understanding was that the external and internal evaluations were to submit parallel reports within an agreed structure to allow comparison, and I submitted a draft following discussion. However an abrupt change occurred which even took some of the course team by surprise when Miguel Lopez proposed shifting the structure to reflect the four 'dimensions' suggested by Harvey and Green in 'Defining Quality'<sup>72</sup>, ethos/coherence, fidelity to objectives, change/transformation and innovation.

---

<sup>72</sup> Harvey, L. and Green, D (1993) 'Defining Quality', in *Assessment and Evaluation in Education*, 18/1. Harvey followed this up with an article 'Beyond Total Quality Management' in *Quality in Higher Education* 2 (1995), which also influenced TALE thinking.

Although with some reservations<sup>73</sup> I supported this approach as subtle and interesting, although there are potential technical difficulties in conflating models *of* with model *for* and in finding some authentic method of taking the analysis back into TALE without recourse to hypothesis testing or reverse engineering. In the event the data collection risked self fulfillment as the participant were asked to write paragraphs about their training project specifically showing how they had been ‘transformative’<sup>74</sup> and ‘innovative’ (Giselle: ‘Hopefully your project created some transformative aspect, no? Miguel: ‘And some element was innovative? You should comment on these two aspects for a wider community of readers’). The wider community still waits.

In order to glean further data (harvesting?) the participants were asked to work in individuals or pairs and fill in proffered shell diagrams. The formats offered included bar charts, pie charts, line graphs, flow charts, mind maps, Venn diagrams and spider charts. Many Talers were unfamiliar with the conventions of the graphics and made elementary mistakes both of appropriateness and logic (e.g. axes without calibration). As an approach both to data collection and the graphical representation of statistics (the data conventionally precedes the choice of representation) it struck me as odd. I have recently been told that the results are not being made available.

I did see it, however, as a further example of the crisis of representation that characterized much of TALE. And as Miguel put it, ‘The TALE curriculum was itself a graphic that became a text’.

One secure conclusion I was able to draw from the Budapest residential seminar was that the quality of individual mentoring throughout TALE was consistent, shrewd, professionally conducted within a facilitating mode, offered a balance between support and challenge, and was perceived as very effective. Although the participants were asked to express their experiences through body sculptures and Mythos cards, I was more impressed with the verbal accounts. Several Talers praised the ‘open exploratory stance’ taken by their mentors and found the ‘dialogue between equals’ enriching and supportive of personal growth. Myriam referred to very sensitive non-directive ‘non-pushy’ mentoring that supported reflection; Mara found the relationship ‘empowering and strengthening’, validating her choices.

Peter Hofmann rounded off the session by analyzing the general features of mentoring (‘you may become one’) in a participatory format with Talers voting with their feet to indicate levels of agreement with a series of mainly partial propositions like ‘mentoring is about supporting the learning of participants’ (‘Not entirely, because it is also about personal relationships’).

The productive tension between personal and group learning ran through all three residential seminars and the tutors were pleased to see it internalized and recycled by the participants. Sven was moved to nail<sup>75</sup> the following quotation to the door of the seminar room:

---

<sup>73</sup> ‘Transformative’ is handled almost mystically, with echoes of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* or at least Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motor Cycle Maintenance*. I was interested to see if it could be developed as a bridge between Miguel and Diego.

<sup>74</sup> The inferential scope of the term clearly puzzled some participants.

<sup>75</sup> Not literally but I wanted to invoke Martin Luther



‘Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. It degenerates into mere arbitrariness... unless self-directed learning is supplemented by group responsible learning.’

The last TALE session (ever, on planet Earth) was conducted solemnly as a kind of celebratory wake, showing yet again the course team’s willingness to borrow or invent rituals as an aid to bringing emotions to the surface. Although quite touching in its way, it was a curious occasion involving a chalk circle on the floor, hushed last confessional conversations and participants choosing the time of their own ‘death’, but in ‘the sure and certain hope’ (as the *Book of Common Prayer* puts it) of continued membership of the church of TALE. It rounded off an aspect of TALE that suggested at least some points of comparison with a charismatic faith group.

### *Concluding comments*

Overall the residential seminars were hugely successful and should be the starting point of any future advanced ToT provision. There are only minor lessons to be learned.

One issue worth picking up at this point is the social and cultural *frisson* of the residential seminars. One of the provocative questions I put to my focus group was whether they felt that aspects of TALE bore some similarity to a religious cult. It was an attempt to see if the participants had shared the persistent general unease I had felt throughout TALE concerning its cultivated ‘alternative’ ambiance and its druid-like predisposition to invent ceremonies. In retrospect I regard the question as badly put. Clearly TALE is in many respects quite unlike a religious *cult* (the charisma attached to its leadership was never deliberately exploitative and there was no systematic ‘brainwashing’). I should have avoided the pejorative and diffuse word ‘cult’ and suggested ‘sect’ instead. There can be little doubt that the mentality inside TALE was often deeply sectarian, defining its ‘informal’ tradition against a ‘formal’ mainstream and defending its position with the secular equivalent of a nonconformist theology. The core invitation, despite the rhetorical commitment to criticality, was to think *inside* the box.

In a previous report I referred to the cultivation of ambiance and the projected sense of ‘special belonging’ at the first residential seminar as having manipulative elements. I also noted the slightly creepy invented ceremonials of arrival and departure, with the participants expected to offer each other little choreographed affirmations and enjoined to post messages to their future selves. The final farewell at the Budapest residential seminar, as we have seen, also featured a quasi-spiritual invented ceremony. One has to suppose the purpose of all this, following Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger*<sup>76</sup>, was to establish TALE in the minds of the participants as so distinctive that entering and leaving it involved a category shift so profound that protection was needed in crossing the ritual impurity of the boundary zone. TALE and non-TALE are thereby treated as binary and essentialist opposites requiring rites of passage between them, a point of view that could usefully be referred to Micah for comment from the perspective of queer theory. Paradoxically this view was held alongside the insistence that TALE needed to be set in the wider context of lifelong learning.

---

<sup>76</sup> Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and Danger*. Major rites of passage include initiation ceremonies at puberty and funerals.

The one participant who most clearly saw the issue and shared my unease was Peter, whose account, lightly edited, is offered below:

‘At times it could have appeared that the ‘attendance of ceremonies’ took precedence over the fulfillment of individual and group commitments. I managed to get over these frequent emotional waterfalls by biting irony and quiet sarcasm. Even if appreciated only by a few others, I’m convinced it enabled me to curb the (at times superfluous) emotional overflow and kick my own and other people’s asses to do something productive and meaningful.’

The other participant’s comments on this issue were mixed. One felt that there were a number of ‘sectarian certainties’ but that a cohesive group ethos was never quite established because of a competitive undercurrent between participants. Another felt that the only sessions having a cult feel about them were Diego’s late evening psychodrama sessions, but saw these as having ambivalently status as ‘alternative provision’ alongside ‘core’ TALE. A third accepted the metaphor at least to the extent of admitting that there was implicit pressure to dampen down ‘internal heresies’.

There was also a concerted attempt in TALE to police the linguistic boundaries. I was publicly rebuked on one occasion for calling the participants ‘students’. The correct term is not just ‘participant’, but ‘participant trainer’ in order to celebrate their dual role. When Miguel made a mild enough jest in the area of gender and earrings, several ‘participant trainers’ subsequently lined up to ‘share their thoughts’ with him, although ‘Pope Peter’ (to accept a running jest of the participants) is yet to institute a TALE confessional.

A more sociological way of looking at it would be to see TALE as bidding to be for the participants the principle normative and comparative reference group. Although not the immediate line managers of any of the participants, they hoped to enjoy the status of ‘the other drummer’. Reference groups and reference individuals<sup>77</sup> are more significant in times of cognitive and emotional uncertainty, which is one of the reasons that TALE consistently represented NFE as an important set of principles under siege.

### **The LOFT**

The LOFT is an acronym standing for ‘Learning Opportunities For Trainers’, and was identified in the initial documentation as the ‘e-learning platform for TALE’. In the program description, the LOFT is represented as ‘serving several [different] purposes during TALE’:

- To explore distance learning through the whole duration of the course, especially between the residential seminars;
- To contribute to the development of essential competences of participant trainers... [a ‘specific feature’ of the LOFT];
- To support communication and sharing between participant trainers and the [Course] Team... with special regard to the implementation of the e-learning thematic modules;
- To explore e-learning possibilities... within European youth work as well as the participants e-learning competence as trainers;

---

<sup>77</sup> See Hyman, H. and Singer, E. (eds.) (1968) *Readings in Reference Group Theory and Research*, New York Free Press.

- To bridge TALE with the wider community of European youth work.

It is not difficult to see these purposes as pulling in different directions.

### *The architecture of the LOFT*

The basic architecture of the LOFT was originally nicely conceived as a hospitable space with many rooms. It hosted a *Passions Corner* (for individual enthusiasms), an *Exploration Corner* (home to the e-learning units), a *Window* (for 'moments of reflection') but also tools held to be of some value in reflection-based PPD. There was also a *Social Corner* that was intended to operate as a social networking site as well as housing personal profiles and a *Kitchen Corner* as a site for task-related peer exchanges.

The decision to include a Passions Corner in the architecture was an imaginative one but in practice the space was from the beginning seriously underused. It remains a good idea. The space designated as 'The Window' was again a pleasing idea invoking Schon's notion of the 'reflective practitioner'. It was mainly concerned with three instruments held to be of some benefit in reflection-based PPD, the Competence Improvement Map (CIM), the Learning Plan and the Self-assessment Questionnaire. As Annette pointed out in her briefing to Dariusz, there had been no consistent request to the participants to share their use of these instruments. There was also no discussion of possible threats to their reliability and validity. The actual use of the CIM is discussed elsewhere in this report.

The social corner housed personal profiles and email addresses, suggested links to games hosted outside the LOFT, and a 'social forum' set up in a way suggestive of a social networking site. In practice, if a little thin, it became a rich exchange of views and requests on a variety of matters free from any 'seeded questions' related to the TALE curriculum. The Kitchen Corner was intended as the primary market place for the peer exchanges around the training projects but insofar as this activity took off it tended to use platforms outside of TALE, including email and Skype, and the Kitchen Corner was never the glue that bound the cohort of peer learners together.

### *The ELUs @ the Exploration Corner*

Although the e-learning units reduced in significance as TALE progressed, eventually losing out almost completely as the LOFT went through a series of redefinitions as to its role in the program (referred to retrospectively as 'phases' although this was never the intention) they remain a monument of unfulfilled real promise. As discussed elsewhere in this report, the main reasons for this shortfall was that the LOFT was not offered the protection of making engagement with the ELUs compulsory and the course team were not able to 'sell' it, due in part to their own agnosticism towards online learning and lack of previous experience of it. Nonetheless they made heroic efforts and the ELUs remain a potential basis for future work, subject to appropriate modification and a pedagogical rethink concerning blended learning in NFE.

Some comment is in order on how the ELU's stand up as a TALE legacy. The basic ingredients of a TALE e-learning unit were an introduction, a number of well-chosen readings together with other resources and a series of threaded bulletin boards around identified themes, most of which were suggested by the participants. There was a consistent effort to encourage participants to contribute their own experience to the debates, and this must be

regarded as a very positive feature, although at times there was an unfulfilled need for a clarifying conceptual overview and theoretical summary, e.g. around an emerging typology.

The first ELU on the context of European youth work was content-driven in a successful but rather conventional way but the second on non-formal learning online exposed deep-seated uncertainties. An eccentric decision was taken to offer a choice of activities including some lighthearted ones that were compatible with an intellectual avoidance strategy (jocund epistemology can do better than this) and the online traffic turned up a hotchpotch of issues and dilemmas that the tutors made no attempt to resolve.

From this point things picked up and the third ELU on youth policy showed an increasing sure-footedness with wholly appropriate activities, addressing the need to bridge the gap between the various European Institutions and the trainers. In effect it asked the participants to become collaborative researchers looking towards 'collective mapping' and ultimately a 'vision'. It demonstrated a strong commitment to critical reflection. I found the concept imaginative and exciting. Student feedback praised the 'realism' of the unit and its 'creative' approach, but there was regret that a diminishing number of the peer group were pitching in and responding to postings. There was perhaps some sense that digital fatigue was beginning to affect the participants. This was a pity, because properly tackled ELU3 could have kick-started by example the value of online learning and achieved critical mass for the LOFT.

The fourth ELU on communities of practice was of real help to many and triggered a debate that went all the way to the Berlin residential seminar. More significant was the LOFT 'Open Days' which added advantageously both synchronicity and the availability online of significant outsiders in the youth field. This proved valuable despite technical glitches and was clearly an idea worth building on. To their credit the participants realized this and took over responsibility for organizing 'Jack Daniels' sessions on Skype, mirrored by the (prohibitionist?) 'tea-time' sessions on the LOFT. Both of these developments were steps in the right direction although a later attempt to extend the time frame to a week was less successful, with disappointing take up. 'There were hardly any people' commented one participant. Another wrote that it was 'not best for many people'.

The LOFT through its history also underwent more than its fair share of technical teething problems, including breakdowns, and was not especially easy to navigate.

Participant comment on the LOFT gave it a mixed rating. There was considerable appreciation of the effort put in to its development and its value as a spasmodic resource to individual learning but its relatively sparse traffic meant that its value in nurturing the whole TALE community was limited. The small number of Talers whose engagement was committed and consistent had some very interesting exchanges but these sometimes went around in circles, as can happen in conditions of asynchronicity, and lacked tutorial monitoring and subtle redirection since the tutors had elected not to 'mix it, possibly for misplaced ideological reasons to do with the NFE 'renunciation of instruction', a point echoed by Gabriella Civico, who argued that NFE could happily engage with online learning by adapting its facilitation brief to online learning more positively<sup>78</sup>.

Other interesting critical points made by the participants included Sven's that the ELU's were 'mostly unconnected' to their needs and had an 'unclear' overall relationship to a trainer's competence profile, and Mara's that they were unremittingly 'knowledge-orientated' and

---

<sup>78</sup> See Madiba, M. (2007) *Investigating Design Issues in E-Learning* (University of Western Cape).

paid too little attention to emotional understanding and skills development ('Strasbourg was emotional and personal but then it was back into the box'). Suncana saw some unavoidable tension in the need to sustain commitment in the teeth of deadlines.

The main reasons for the shortfall of the LOFT up to the second residential seminar seem reasonably well understood:

1. A tension between the twin roles of the LOFT as the online element of the TALE curriculum (i.e. 'e-learning units') and its contrasting status as the social networking site of a 'community of practice';
2. The relative invisibility of the course team online and consequent difficulties in identifying an interactive TALE online pedagogy;
3. Issues arising from the nature and extent of the participants' online traffic, which was increasingly skewed and over-reliant on a small number of key contributors.
4. The tendency for traffic on the LOFT to backslide towards the linguistic and discourse conventions of a social networking site (i.e. 'chat')
5. The large disparity in online traffic, with participant postings varying both in quality and volume.

Although there was a consistent effort to get the participant trainers to contribute from their own experience, they were given little training in critical reading for what was largely a text-based program. All these factors led to the emergence in Berlin of a toxic mix of envy and resentment as those whose contribution had been limited felt they were being 'personally criticized', a NFE shibboleth.

At the Berlin seminar the course team took the decision to radically reconfigure the role of the LOFT. A team meeting on the penultimate evening suggested a new role more in support of individualized learning, particularly by sharing the outcomes of the personal learning plans and the training projects and their eventual dissemination. They were also invited to explore what role e-learning might play more generally in European youth work (what the team called 'working from a specific [NFE] educational philosophy to online program design'). There was little evidence that this 'invitation' was taken up. The LOFT was also seen as a basis for 'doing something' with the CIM (competence improvement map) and contributing to the development of competence profiling at European level. These ideas, which at the time I thought to be judicious, never really halted the slow decline of the LOFT.

In so far as it continued at all, the most interesting traffic remained in the Lounge, which accommodated what was unashamedly designated a 'social style forum'. Perceptive postings included exchanges on anti-oppressive education (one recommending the work of Kevin Kumashiro), the NFE tendency to treat book knowledge as inferior to a naïve 'experiential learning,' and problems associated with the 'mobility ghetto', i.e. the tendency of students travelling abroad not to integrate into local life.

### **The training and personal learning projects**

An outstandingly successful feature of TALE both in design and execution were the personal learning and training projects. In general they were an impressive testimony both to the quality of the participants and of TALE. One or two examples are put forward to give the flavour.

Micah is one of a number of participants who brought to TALE an existing area of expertise and became an important resource for the group, while at the same time reaping the benefit of an enhanced European profile. Micah's training project was a Higher Education focussed study session organised through ANSO (the association of Nordic and Pol-Balt LGBTQ Student Organizations) and was concerned with promoting equality between all possible genders by supporting and strengthening activist networks. Funded by the Directorate of Youth and Sport it involved outside experts in a discussion-based deconstruction of the language of gender, going beyond 'queer theory' to a more general 'queer pedagogy', i.e. the disposition to challenge 'essentialist' binary categories wherever they are found. Micah described the experience as 'powerful, successful and mind blowing'. At the third residential seminar TALE participants played a card game developed to test basic understandings and we all saw its potential.

TALE encouraged participants to make significant contributions to national policy deliberations. Adina's personal learning project was a substantial, perceptive and scholarly study of Romanian youth policy in relation to a variety of local questions like local sluggish legislation processes and compliance issues. Its main theme was the tension between European compliance and national coherence. Tomasz's main field of action during TALE has been as a trainer in the EVS field on national and international level (EVS trainings for volunteers, representatives of organizations, mentors), trainer in the context of the Youth in action program (main topics: recognition of NFL, Learning support). He has also been a member of several national and international pools (national EVS AND YiA trainer pool, SALTO-trainers' pool) as well as a local NGO (Foundation Arte Ego). His training project in Estonia, with three others, explored the link between values and action, a consistent TALE theme.

Andriy, Mara, Olga and Sven ran a successful project focussed on Free Style Facilitation as a means of empowerment, bringing together 21 youth leaders from Armenia, Belarus, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Ukraine. It combined the TALE tradition of NFE with the more specific theories of 'neutral intervention' put forward by Roger Schwarz. It was a good example of TALE thinking finding common cause with parallel traditions. There was a nice light-hearted touch in using a parody of non-directive facilitation from *Red Dwarf*. On the other hand it nearly did not take place at all, due to the absence of back-up financial arrangement in the event of projects not getting funded. Sven reports:

'There was no funding pre-approved for our projects and it turned out to be a big challenge to get the training projects approved. I applied with three distinct projects, and one was approved only just in time to host the project a month before the third residential seminar'.

It went ahead only thanks to the generosity of Ralph who convinced his association to apply for the project even though he was not one of the trainers. If he had not stepped in they probably would not have had the opportunity to implement the training project. Pre-approved funding or a focus on the training projects earlier on in the TALE process might have prevented this situation. Ralph's unselfish collegiality is also a tribute the atmosphere in TALE at its best, and it was by no means an isolated instance. Pablo had a similar story:

'Anne approached me at the first residential seminar to invite me as external facilitator for the Study Session for which she was course director. Thanks to her I could have a training project addressing most of my expectations and I entered into

a contact to collaborate further with her organization. She was one of the angels in my TALE process and I must be grateful.'

Peter's experience of TALE mutual peer support emphasized the value of collective debriefing:

When implementing one training project in Macedonia with Stefan and Kriszta we got through the complete process of designing, implementing and evaluating a particular training design focusing on the development of youth work competences. What gave me the most for my own learning was actually a two-hour constructively critical feedback session between the three of us during the training in Berlin.

### **3. Quality standards in TALE**

It is possible to approach reporting on quality standards in TALE from a number of directions, and this report employs several, beginning with the availability of published generic frameworks. Although there would obvious advantages in looking at quality directly, evidence of learning is irreducibly a matter of collecting sample evidence. In practice, approaches to quality in educational programs tend sometimes to be procedural (as in so-called quality control or TQM frameworks<sup>79</sup>) or outcomes based, including assessment and testing and the collection and presentation of declarative statements in portfolios, or else by 'impact studies'<sup>80</sup> of program consequences.

Another approach to quality involves trying to develop 'proxy indicators', i.e. looking for features that tend to correlate with quality. This was the approach taken by the TALE internal evaluation, in which the team looked for the presence of features like 'innovation' and 'transformation'. There were a number of indicators that could be read as confirming TALE as a quality offering. As well as the quality of the training projects and portfolios, there were high levels of commitment from the Talers and only a single drop out. The individual learning narratives were impressive and unidirectional towards personal and professional development and the questionnaire feedback was solidly favourable if not overwhelmingly supportive, particularly in the open-ended questions.<sup>81</sup>

We begin by taking a look at generic quality criteria.

#### **Quality standards against generic quality criteria**

This is a useful method of analysis, although a number of schema might have been adopted, one of which was used by the course team for the internal evaluation<sup>82</sup>. An appropriate

---

<sup>79</sup> This approach has been open to some criticism. See Hart, W. (1997) 'The quality mongers', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 31 No 2, 273-308.

<sup>80</sup> There is an unhelpful recent trend for impact studies to be nudged by governments committed to an audit culture in the direction of demonstrating economic benefits.

<sup>81</sup> In my view the returns would have been even more favourable had some five-point scale questions not been calibrated largely against 'expectations'. This not only made statistical aggregation an untidy process (expectations vary) but also probably depressed the results, given the evidence that TALE carried exceptionally high levels of expectation.

<sup>82</sup> See Harvey, L. and Green, D (1993) *Op. Cit.*

starting point is the influential Fennes and Otten paper *Quality in non-formal education and training in the youth field*<sup>83</sup> and the matrix on page 24 arising from Box 7 *Quality Standards* on page 23. The list is presented as a set of generic quality criteria in tune with proposals and concepts for quality previously formulated in the context of European level non-formal education and training in the youth field. The first eight criteria are general ‘quality standards for non-formal education and training’ with two additional standards (particularly appropriate for TALE) for European level non-formal education and training in the youth field’.

The matrix adds six boxes for each category, based on two sets of three premised on different models of provision. I do not propose using the input/throughput/output model but adhere to the other set, based on structures, processes and outcomes. Although using the model I have no final allegiance to the criteria, which I regard as open to question at a number of points. For example, the box and the matrix both assume the ‘upward compatibility’ argument and treats European-level training as necessarily underpinned by ‘the core principles and practices of non-formal education’. Training for nursery teachers is not itself *conducted* entirely within the core principles and practices of heuristic play, although it is an important content area.

There can be little doubt that TALE comes out of an examination in these terms with flying colors, as brief comment on each of the criteria indicates.

1. *The activity is underpinned by the core principles and practices of non-formal education*

This is entirely an issue of process and TALE in general overwhelmingly kept faith with the core principles and practices of non-formal education to the maximum extent that was feasible in TALE’s particular circumstances as advanced ToT with strong political expectations placed upon it. There was during the early developmental period some evidence of a ‘quasi-fundamentalist’ approach to this commitment that resulted in an occasional mismatch between the rhetoric and the compromised reality, but increasingly the course team saw the ambiguities as productive and creatively worked within them.

‘NFE may be principled but I am not sure about its coherence [in TALE]. Blending can work, although not easily. I oppose emancipation of NFE through its formalization’. [Peter Dral]

‘The values of non-formal education are compromised in every course. So the question for me would be how TALE made those compromises, considering that TALE was never meant to be the paradigm of non-formal education but rather to explore its borders in many senses. The non-negotiable aspect is NFE as a socio-political educational praxis’. [Miguel]

The learning was experiential, based on intercultural learning experiences, holistic and process-orientated as well as to a permissible extent self-directed. Only the principles of voluntarism and control over curriculum content were (reluctantly?) abandoned. Yet the participant trainers were given as much autonomy as could reasonably be expected in the circumstances (by some standards more) and the tutoring was resolutely ‘facilitating’, based

---

<sup>83</sup> The study was supported by the Youth Partnership and SALTO-YOUTH.



on mutual respect and equality of esteem, if not role.

2. *The activity meets identified needs in the community*

There was an interesting ambiguity in the term 'community' for TALE, as for most education and training it refers to the local community, whereas TALE was explicitly furthering European Community policies in the area of intercultural development. Nonetheless, the participant trainers as 'intercultural learners' became hybrids able to interplay local, national, regional and international perspectives. Although TALE answered felt and expressed needs at all of these levels, one participant expressed surprise that there was no systematic needs analysis of the participants' own priorities beyond what was covered in the application forms.

3. *The activity is consciously conceptualized and framed to meet identified and appropriate objectives as well as to allow for unexpected outcomes*

As indicated above, the position was more nuanced in this area of operation as a fractured discourse arose around the appropriate language for curriculum specification, which had become a battle ground for opposed and distinctive voices both within the course team and the Steering Group. In general the linchpin of the 'conceptualization and framing' was an effort to establish some coherence between program activities and the competences profile, supported by devices like the competence improvement map. But there is a gap between 'properly formulated objectives' (if this is what the model implies) and 'competences', many of which are either dispositional or more readily 'caught' than 'taught'. It is not self-evident that competences constitute a secure basis for curriculum development; yet the TALE course team would tick this box without hesitation and most participant trainers agree.

The TALE tutors were not only prepared to allow for unexpected outcomes but took some imaginative risks of the kind likely to produce them. All of the residential seminars demonstrated a kind of pedagogical tacking to take advantage of changing wind conditions, and one of the reasons that planning meetings typically finished well beyond midnight was the constant debates around the desirability of tactical shifts in the next day's activities because of an unexpected outcome or hypersensitivity to a shifting mood.

4. *The activity is well designed, planned and carried out, in both educational and organizational terms*

The course team did not stint the design and planning process, which was exemplary in terms of how a fairly large group of colleagues can go about this kind of work. Joint planning and team teaching is a difficult art and the course team achieved a coherence in guiding philosophy, input, throughput and output. The 'team scripts' for each day of the residential seminars were models of detailed planning. Any reservations about the model as a generic template for European ToT cannot detract from the judgment that TALE was well designed, planned and carried out within its well-understood and specific educational genre.

5. *The activity is adequately resourced*

I believe so, particularly in the generous support offered to the participant trainers, although a financial evaluation is not a part of my brief. I did, however, form the impression that the tutors' remuneration did not adequately reflect the time involved to support TALE at the level of commitment they offered.

6. *The activity demonstrably uses its resources effectively and efficiently*

TALE was a major investment with well-defined strategic and political goals. In my view and in the view of many informants it used the resources at its disposal to maximum effect. However, additional resources that at one time looked likely to be made available to support an expert group to advance technically the 'recognition' issue would have made a substantial difference to TALE's intellectual and policy legacy. Although this did not 'spoil the ship for a halfpennyworth of tar' it was a regrettable loss of opportunity.

7. *The activity is monitored and evaluated*

TALE has been evaluated from at least four distinctive and overlapping vantage points, making it one of the most comprehensively documented current European programs, and not just within ToT. There is the opportunity to check the external evaluation against the 'documentation' of TALE and in comparison with any eventual products of the internal evaluation. Additionally the participant trainers filled in mid-term and concluding questionnaires, offering judgments on the program across a wide range of its attributes. The Steering Group also performed a quasi-evaluative function, offering corrective guidelines, particularly in the earlier stages.

8. *The activity acknowledges and makes visible its outcomes and results*

There is an issue here, which is discussed below. Whereas there has been every effort to make TALE's outcomes and results visible there is an imbalance towards a soft recognition that (however convincing) cannot entirely make up for the lack of progress in moving the agenda forward with respect to the formal recognition of trainer and ToT competences. In the history of the professionalization of occupational groups external recognition is the only known route<sup>84</sup> and inhibitions derived from a NFE quasi-fundamentalist perspective seem to this observer patently out of place.

9. *The activity integrates principles and practices of intercultural learning*

Given the background and impressive career histories of the core and extended course team and the careful recruitment of participant trainers to offer an experiential base for comparative intercultural learning, it is not surprising that this became a special feature of TALE and a vehicle for its signing up to the European ideological project. But it was also well thought through and delivered in terms of specific principles and pedagogical practices, particularly peer support mechanisms and joint training projects in a variety of European settings. Although under-used, the LOFT supported intercultural learning by appropriate readings and later by opportunities to exchange and comment on training projects.

10. *The activity contributes to European-level policy aims and objectives in the youth field*

This criterion is treated in elsewhere in the report.

**Quality of the educational experience as judged by the participant trainers**

---

<sup>84</sup> See Jackson, J [ed.] (1970) *Professions and Professionalization*, Cambridge University Press.

I refer the reader here to the results of the participants' questionnaire and comments produced by the course team, which can be cross-referred to this analysis. It is important that aspects of the TALE package should be interrogated from the perspective of what can be built on post-TALE, and the views of the participants, although never definitive and in my view occasionally misguided, are always valuable.

An unidentified member of the course team wrote perceptively as follows in an internal review:

'There is not yet a common vision of what should be the profile of trainers at European level. Nonetheless, tools such as CIM, the Self-Assessment Questionnaire and background documents such as the comparative one between the 8 KC in the youth and training field and the TALE essential competences can definitively contribute to such profile. However, follow-up and impact will solely depend on what the stakeholders decide to do with those tools'.

Although the Competence Improvement Map (CIM) as presented and used fell a little short of technical sophistication, most participants undoubtedly found it useful and the stakeholders will doubtless realize that it holds the promise of future development. Musa declared the CIM to be 'the best part of TALE and the reason I began to explore myself and my needs'. Sven saw a symbiotic relationship between the CIM and his personal learning plan, which originated in the CIM but to some extent departed from it, adopting the alternative format of a 'mind map'. Adina used it to analyze her own competence development at the end of TALE but also successfully introduced a simplified version for the youth leaders she had been working with. Tomasz used the CIM as an example and inspiration to discuss the development of a national competence framework for in the Polish Youth in Action trainer pool. Mara also took it beyond the immediate context of TALE and sent the CIM ('an important breakthrough for me') to the national network (but as 'a thermometer not a Bible').

Participants reported a mixed response to the TALE arrangements for peer collaboration. In its informal operation, peer learning was a significant contribution to personal learning, both at the residential seminars and (less obviously, although there were exceptions) online. The problems arose through attempts to 'manage' the interaction. Adina and Musa worked well as a duo, after Mara pulled out of the arranged trio. Experiences differed; some of the peer trios worked well and some didn't. Nadia praised her peer learning with Ralph and Suncana as one of the best parts of TALE ('they helped me a lot to think about my feelings and mental health when working in youth organizations'). Sven on the other hand rejected the whole concept of external arranging:

'The concept of an 'arranged' peer trio did not work for me at all. In between the first and the second seminar, after our peer trios were chosen by chance, we met rarely. We were not fully 'in tune' so I looked for peer support elsewhere. I formed an alternative peer trio with Mara and Pablo'.

The mentoring was almost universally regarded as principled and effective, challenging as well as supportive to an extent that is difficult under NFE norms, although the word 'challenge' rides high in the rhetoric. Although one or two participants detected an imbalance towards support over challenge (one precisely declaring that 'the challenge disappeared in February 2010', another admitting that he 'would have preferred more probing') the consensus was otherwise with the following comments typical.

‘Gulesin’s mentoring was exactly as I needed it’. [Adina]

‘The maturity of Gisele as a mentor kept me motivated; she was the only reason why I managed’. [Nadia]

‘Miguel’s mentoring was a good example of the effective facilitation of learning. I liked the balance between personal and professional matters’. [Andriy]

‘My mentor relationship with Peter was one of the biggest highlights during my process of TALE; we had a very effective and supportive dialogue, and from every meeting I got many new ideas how to think deeper or different about the things I do or plan to do’. [Tomasz]

‘For my needs and learning state [Diego’s] mentoring was more than effective. I was given mentorship advice that I considered fruitful and relevant. [Pablo]

The learning within the mentoring process was often mutual. Gulesin offered a convincing account of how she and Micah formed a powerful mutually supportive relationship as two practitioners working in parallel fields within human rights education.

The underachievement of the LOFT and its path from what one participant described as ‘a journey from initial enthusiasm to loneliness’ is handled elsewhere in this report. To some extent the mentoring arrangements compensated for this shortfall.

So where lay the intellectual challenge of TALE? There were several suggestions that participants up to a point were left to find their own challenges. TALE as self-directed learning was perhaps oblique in the challenges it felt it could offer, since what are challenges other than invitations to change direction? Two contrasting comments are worth citing in this context the, first from Andriy the second from Peter:

‘The whole of TALE was an intellectual challenge for me breaking stereotypes [but] the most important breakthrough was the focus on self-directed learning. The highlight was facilitated learning. I am trying to apply this approach to my training courses and continuous work with young people, particularly with volunteers’.

[Serendipitous] ‘conversations were the real source of intellectual challenge rather than some ingrained feature of TALE itself... I’m just not sure if the selected ELU topics (e.g. definition of youth work, recognition, etc.) were the best options for eliciting intellectual discussions. They prompted us more to document the known than to explore (unearth, discover) the unknown. Eventually, the real intellectual challenge had to be posed by each Taler for him/herself. My own intellectual challenge circled around the topic of impact assessment. How do I know if I make a difference?’

### **Demonstrating quality: the recognition debate**

One of the declared political and strategic goals of TALE was ‘to contribute to the development of a profile of youth trainers in Europe by fostering the recognition of essential competences of trainers in the youth and non-formal education fields’. This implied that TALE might act as a test bed for recognition procedures in the field and not simply offer

descriptive certification that was program specific, a task the course team felt more comfortable with.

There is an important distinction between possessing quality and being able to demonstrate it unequivocally to an outside constituency, and a further distinction between falling short by some external standard or criteria and not meeting the conditions of the adjudication. One thorny issue is the political one of the power relationships between 'candidates' and 'adjudicators' in any field and to some in NFE the recognition debate can scarcely avoid being pursued in terms they regard as inappropriate:

'The tools for assessing learning [through formal or non-formal means] is essentially the same' begins Chapter 7 ('Assessment Methods') of the *European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning*<sup>85</sup>, going on to assert in paragraph 7.72 that 'declarative methods'<sup>86</sup>, the TALE mainstay, should only be used 'in conjunction with other methods that have more independent evaluation built in'. In the CEDEFOP framework there is an additional insistence on 'predefined criteria'. This feature of the TALE ship, therefore, could *not* be 'built while sailing'; the criteria needed either to be defined at the outset or be sufficiently implicit to be capable of retrospective alignment. Peter Hofmann had his doubts:

'I asked myself what could these "pre-defined criteria" be in case of TALE: the TALE competences? The initial self-assessment with the CIM in Seminar 1? The resulting learning plans of the participant-trainers? Whatever of those (or even others?! ) it was not transparent at all that those should serve the "assessment" or even "validation" of learning outcomes - one of the core principles proposed by the European guidelines.

The TALE competence framework on its own is for me not an instrument for validation ... If we are striving for recognition of non-formal adult educators/trainers it needs a process of assessment and validation which includes prior learning, prior qualifications, self-assessment, observations, etc. a process which is built on a competence profile offering the pre-defined criteria to validate against... Having said all this I realize there is a certain lack of coherence between some of the strategic-political objectives of TALE (especially regarding recognition) and the actual implementation of TALE'.

In relation to the next point I must declare an interest that could easily be regarded as a potential source of bias. Although an external evaluator offers formative feedback in good faith it is perfectly legitimate for the advice to be discounted or ignored. Nevertheless, I believe the warning I gave in an earlier report should have been heeded:

'The competencies framework requires an immediate injection of expert outside support as a necessary condition of TALE meeting its political objectives. Merely offering participants a loose but powerful instrument for self-assessment could compromise the external recognition of the qualification, particularly if it proves impossible to develop proxy indicators of the enhanced competences across each of the categories.'

#### **4 The fulfillment of the political and strategic objectives of TALE**

---

<sup>85</sup> CEDEFOP (2000)

<sup>86</sup> In TALE these are called 'self assessment' although an ambiguous 'plus' is added.

The original specification was as follows:

1. To serve the development of a coordinated approach for training trainers in the youth field in Europe
2. To extend the existing group of experienced trainers able to develop and implement quality training activities in the European youth field, and to support the further development of the existing European trainers' pools;
3. To contribute to the development of a profile of youth trainers in Europe by fostering the recognition of essential competences of trainers in the youth and non-formal education fields;
4. To develop and use innovative concepts and practices for training trainers in non-formal education across Europe;
5. To highlight the values underlying European youth work and to reflect on how they can best be promoted in training activities;
6. To contribute to the quality and sustainability of the youth program of the European commission, the Council of Europe and their respective partners<sup>87</sup>;
7. To make use of the existing resources of these stakeholders for a common aim and to create synergies;
8. To exemplify the beneficial interaction of youth research, youth policy and practice and its importance in the design, implementation and follow-up of training activities [although there is some evidence that this 'magic triangle' may be stronger in rhetoric than reality and in need of political support if it is to become realised: DJ].

Overall the record of TALE in relation to these political and strategic objectives is a good one, although with some slippage at the margins. There is very substantial evidence that the TALE participant trainers benefited from the program not only in their own estimation but also in the judgments of sponsors and stakeholders in their home settings<sup>88</sup>. Both in their TALE training projects and in continuing to offer high quality training activities in the European youth field they can legitimately be regarded as a proven resource.

In this respect TALE has made a significant contribution to the sustainability of the youth program, and in general has contributed to the furtherance of political aims and synergies. This required that TALE should be coherent with EU political processes in the field of youth (Agenda 2020, the priorities of Youth in Action, the New Cooperative Framework etc.<sup>89</sup>) and grounded in what is known about the political, economic and social context of young people in Europe. The participants were kept up to date in these matters and were given substantial contact with the major stakeholders, particularly at the final Budapest residential seminar, where they impressed with their knowledge of European policies and procedures. Less

---

<sup>87</sup> This strategic objective was made into a separate item in the evaluator's brief, but I am handling it at this point to maintain continuity.

<sup>88</sup> See the relevant evidence elsewhere in this report.

<sup>89</sup> The development was also coherent in terms of the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning within the European youth field (Council of Europe: 2003)

impressive was TALE's management of the policy/practice/research 'magic triangle' with a research orientation and cast of mind coming a poor third<sup>90</sup>

A note from the European Commission in response to a question from the evaluator indicated that the contribution of TALE had registered with the stakeholders:

'TALE was instrumental in widening the audience of debate regarding training quality, recognition and youth policy e.g. by transferring results to the Youth in Action's Training of Trainers.

Lessons learned during the implementation of TALE (e.g. regarding trainer competences) serve as valuable input to the renewed European Training Strategy of the Youth in Action Program. The SALTO-Youth Training and Cooperation Resource Centre and the network of Youth in Action National Agencies played an important role in this respect'.

TALE has been exemplary in embodying and highlighting the values underlying European youth work and signed up enthusiastically to what I have termed the European ideological project of core aspirant values for the Community, in relation to which youth activity is only a sector. The TALE program consistently encouraged participants to reflect on the underpinning values of practical youth activity. In general, too, the course team avoided the trap of trying to teach the values directly, although sailing a bit near the wind at times. In any responsible pedagogy of moral education the task is to interrogate values not to indoctrinate them.<sup>91</sup>

### **Quality of personnel**

One predictor of success in any collaborative enterprise is the team who are chosen to develop or implement it. In TALE, which depended on coordinated team teaching, quality of personnel was critical. It was also important (on the analogy of a football team) that selection should be governed by considerations both of individual talent and group coherence with complementary roles and smooth interplay.

#### *The core course team*

By common consent TALE fielded a formidable core team, although in some ways not an obvious one, and their attacking style was not without risk. Since the pool of European 'trainers of trainers' at this level is not huge it is unsurprising that they had previous knowledge of what each other could offer and were able to play into each other's strengths. An outsider's or match critic's commentary on TALE United on the field of play might imagine Peter Hofmann to be wearing the captain's armband<sup>92</sup>. His quiet deeply reflective

---

<sup>90</sup> See e.g. the handling of the graphical representation of statistics in the Budapest residential seminar.

<sup>91</sup> This is particularly important given the history of youth work in the communist block. Indoctrination does not become good simply because we approve of the ideas being indoctrinated.

<sup>92</sup> The team were, of course, ostentatiously non-hierarchical. However, the participants picked up this quality and there was a running joke equating Peter to the Pope. Several members of the Steering Group felt that TALE should have had a formal course director.

persona is balanced by a low-key but charismatic authority<sup>93</sup> and he possesses an inner judgment and determination that make him a natural source of measured advice in times of pedagogical stress; he was the one who placed the ball and took the penalty kicks when decisive action was required, notably in Berlin. He was also the most overtly theoretical of the team, unrivaled in his commitment to NFE but also the most articulate in direct explanation. He went along with TALE's 'cult of the body'<sup>94</sup> but it was noticeable that in contact exercises like 'leading the trusting blind' he was less touchy-feely than colleagues and did so gently at arms length with a faint detached smile playing about his lips.

The strength of any football team is in its midfield and TALE was fortunate to have in Gisele Evrard and Gülesin Nemutlu, two outstanding and experienced practitioners of non-formal methods capable of controlling the play. Both were courteous and user-friendly with a facilitating style that was supportive but also sensitive and intellectually probing. Gisele in particular showed herself to be highly tuned to the emotional nuances of pedagogical encounters as well as clear thinking about goals and directions. Her suggestions at team meetings were frequently subtle and imaginative and her ability to summarize complex arguments on the hoof at a flip chart was never less than impressive. I formed the impression that her sense of the preciousness and privacy of educational encounters sometimes got in the way of the sector's need for models of best practice to be placed in the public domain, but I understood where she was coming from. Her recent career move to work for the Partnership at Strasbourg was unsurprising.

Gülesin could be considered the midfield link player who held the team together spiritually and collegially by the force of a delightful but well-grounded personality. She played a tongue-in-cheek 'good morning campers' role at the residential seminars, but beyond the self-irony the enthusiasm and optimism were catching. By way of contrast in the team meetings she was thoughtful and reflective and at times gently skeptical, acting as a kind of intellectual conscience and reality check to some of the wilder ideas. Her reputation as a mentor supporting individual learning plans and training projects was outstanding. I had hoped that TALE would have made more use of her serious outside interest in educational games and ludic epistemology, but it was not to be.

Diego Marin Romera and Miguel Angel Garcia Lopez were played as twin strikers, combining well despite their idiosyncratic and contrasting styles. Diego evidenced all the foundational skills of the NFE facilitator to which he added both an emotional intensity and an occasional affecting shyness, but his outstanding and unique contribution to TALE was that he brought in a set of highly developed skills grounded in physical theatre<sup>95</sup>, psychotherapy<sup>96</sup>,

---

<sup>93</sup> I am using charismatic authority in the sense of the term developed by Weber (1924) where it is contrasted with traditional or legal authority. Charismatic authority is where a leader is perceived as having sanctity, heroism or exemplary character in a relevant context.

<sup>94</sup> It is increasingly fashionable to treat the body as a kind of ubiquitous metaphor. See Baudrillard J. (1995) *Simulacra and Simulation (The Body, In Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism)*.

<sup>95</sup> There were perceptible links to Augusto Boal's forum theatre but also to Clive Barker's 'theatre games'. See also Anderson, G. Gallegos, B. and Alexander, K. (2004) *Performance Theories in Education: Power, Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity*, London, Routledge.

<sup>96</sup> NFE in general is appears willing to leak therapeutic discourse into a genre where its appropriateness can be questioned, and the basis of this assumption perhaps needs to be re-examined.



alternative spiritualities<sup>97</sup> and ethnomethodology<sup>98</sup>. It is not difficult to see these as a potentially explosive mix, although his risk management was close to excellent. The sessions were often optional ('off piste') and held late at night in surroundings where low lights, ambient music, pillows-as-furniture or joss sticks were used to create mood. Diego is an inveterate performer (even, I suspect, when meditating) and his sheer forcefulness was to some extent a relief against the background of pedagogical recessiveness in NFE. As I commented in an earlier report, 'Diego is a brave, highly skilled and imaginative risk taker... at times cajoling, at times bullying and at times quite terrifying'. Role-play and theatre aside, however, Diego came across to team members and participants alike as a sweet and emotionally generous individual whose empathy and concern could be relied upon.

For many participants his sessions were the highlights of the residential experience and were handled with all the appropriate safeguards built in including the right to withdraw from a challenging activity<sup>99</sup>. However, I was alarmed when several of the participants, in spite of lacking Diego's background, suggested they might try something similar at home.

Miguel is an acquired taste, like the very best Glenfiddich malt whiskey. He, too, is a talented risk taker, but the risks he took, quite deliberately, were of a different kind. The dilemma for all purist NFE educators, even within a facilitating mode, is how to avoid the odium of the podium and be a resource to participants without 'spoon-feeding' them. The Lopez uncompromising solution has been to evolve an often witty and amusing intellectual style that either (Christ-like) answers a question with another question or gives answers that are so multi-faceted and opaque that the questioners have no alternative to treating his response as a map and picking their individual way through the territory. In an earlier report I characterized his ideas-driven discourse as 'open-ended to the point of frequently revising its content and syntax mid sentence, occupying the best of both worlds as a non-authoritarian expert'. At first some participants found his style of argumentation elusive but it was increasingly realized by virtually everybody that Miguel was TALE's slightly wayward genius, difficult at times but definitively worth the effort required to tap into his formidable intellect and wide experience. Once or twice some of his more mercurial moves left even his colleagues behind, e.g. his sudden revision of the internal evaluation strategy. He also enjoyed an enviable reputation as a caring and imaginative mentor, his interventions making a difference.

It would be difficult to see this team as easily replicable and at least to that extent TALE is best regarded as a personality-dependant innovation. But of the overall quality of the team there can be no doubt. The changing cast of educational assistants also contributed in their different ways to the success.

---

<sup>97</sup> For example Eastern meditative or relaxation techniques whether or not assisted by mantras. TALE as a whole took the view that world myths, allegories and stories can be an important resource in understanding the narratives of the human condition (e.g.. the use of the Mythos cards).

<sup>98</sup> Ethnomethodology (see Garfinkel, H. 1967 *Studies in Ethnomethodology*) is a form of enquiry in which social insights are gained by deliberately destabilising assumptions or breaking conventions, and analysing the effects (a kind of deviant participant observation). For example, Diego required participants to gaze into each other's eyes for uncomfortably long periods without acknowledging presence or looking away.

<sup>99</sup> This is important in a multicultural setting as socio-cultural conventions governing personal physical space vary.

## *The Participants*

The success of TALE was also highly dependent on the choice of participant trainers and here again there was a need to balance a variety of factors as well as deliver a coherent group with the right kind of ambition and background for a serious career investment in advanced ToT. The recruitment of participant trainers for TALE was based on a defined profile, a widely distributed call, an inclusive process and a transparent selection process.

The definition of the participant trainers profile was based on the needs identified and expressed by different stakeholders (Council of Europe, European Commission, SALTOs, National Agencies of the Youth in Action programme, European Youth Forum, etc.) at different times, including during the Stakeholders meeting on European-level Training of/for Trainers, which was organised by the Youth-Partnership in Budapest (19-21 June 2007). Florian Cescon<sup>100</sup>, who organized the process, writes that to his knowledge it was 'the first time in Europe that so many different stakeholders were requested to express their needs before a call for participants was launched for a specific training programme'. Based on these needs, the secretariat of the Youth Partnership drew a precise profile, which was discussed with the course team and the Steering Group, and integrated in the call for participant trainers for TALE.

This profile required:

- Relevant experience in designing, implementing and evaluating training activities in the youth field at national or European level;
- Previous experience in European youth work and in running activities with an intercultural dimension;
- Ability to run a training in English and to communicate in another language (mother tongue included);
- A potential and need to further develop their training competences in order to act as trainers in the youth field at European level in the future;
- Support from a national or European organisation in the youth field in which they are active as volunteer or paid staff member, or for which they run trainings;
- Commitment to use the developed competences in the European youth field after the training course;
- Readiness to engage in an individual learning path of a trainer as a part of their lifelong learning process;
- Commitment to attend the Course for its full duration and participate actively in all its elements.

The last element in the profile was never properly implemented with respect to the LOFT.

A precise timetable was drafted in order to help applicants to realise the level of commitment expected in TALE over the following 2 years. One of the aims of this process was to reduce the considerable drop-out rate associated with long term ToT and this proved very successful with only one participant dropping out for reasons unconnected to the quality of the program.

The call for participants for TALE was officially launched on 18 December 2008 and was posted on all relevant websites (Youth-Partnership, SALTOs, NAs, partner NGOs, etc.). In

---

<sup>100</sup> I am grateful to Florian Cescon for data and comments on the recruitment process.

addition, the call was also sent directly to specific channels (via e-mail), in order to ensure a wide distribution:

- Network of YiA National Agencies and SALTOS;
- Trainers' pool of the Council of Europe;
- Trainers' pool of the European Youth Forum;
- Previous participants in ToT Compasito, TC Compasito and ToT HRE 2004/2006;
- International Youth NGOs;
- Some national youth councils;
- European youth organisations that had recently organised study sessions and might need to train trainers.

The call for participants emphasised that suitable applications were welcome, irrespective of gender, disability, marital or parental status, racial, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion, belief or sexual orientation. Also, in order to further strengthen the development of the youth field in these regions, participant trainers from countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and South East Europe (whether they were nationals from or residents in these countries) fulfilling these requirements were particularly encouraged to apply.

The whole selection process was transparent, with the initial pre-selection by the Partnership secretariat subject first to comment from the stakeholders then final selection by the course team and Steering Group, who sought to balance gender, geographical location and complementarities of experience.

The selection process was not only exemplary in meeting its self-imposed criteria but produced a group of participants who were ideally placed to meet the political and strategic objectives of the exercise.

## **5 The impact of TALE on the learning of participants and their organizations and other stakeholders**

The impact of TALE on the learning of participants was most clearly seen informally in the increased sophistication of their analysis and deliberations around issues of European and national policy relevant to ToT, as picked up both by the course team and the stakeholders who met the participants, and formally in the quality of their training projects and other training activities undertaken during the period. Self-reflection applied in a variety of contexts and use of instruments like the CIM assisted this process.

Members of the Steering Group and other stakeholders had the opportunity of meeting the TALE participants at the residential seminars, particularly the third one in Budapest where in effect a number of surgeries were given to general appreciation. As Tomasz commented, 'The stakeholders involved presented the clear picture what TALE participants could bring for the youth field'.

Daniel Nuijten responded to my request for comment on behalf of the European Youth Forum; he saw TALE as a 'quality program', an assessment based on working with trainers that had been involved in the TALE processes and seeing 'the quality of their work improving over the period:

'The way they looked at training and implemented in YFJ activities was extremely beneficial [and of] immediate benefit for the European Youth Forum. Youth organizations in Europe have constant need for capacity building, which often leads

to clear training needs. The YFJ plays a supporting role in this, not only by providing trainings needed by member organizations but also by helping them to develop tools they can implement to improve capacity and support training activities. As there was quite a large group of Talers with direct connections to the YFJ or our member organizations, this led immediately to an easy access to trainers who were actively developing themselves and their training skills’.

A report from the Polish national association reported Tomasz as using new and developed competences in the work of the NA and national EVS trainers’ team and in support of the implementation of strategic objectives.

TALE was also seen as relevant for the YFJ as an opportunity for institutional cooperation between partners in the field of training. It was a place where views on training could be exchanged and further developed. The impression the Daniel Nuijten got from meeting the TALE participants was also favorable:

‘They are a very self-conscious group of young people that during the last two years worked very seriously on their self-development as trainers. It was a pleasure to meet with them, to listen to their stories and ideas and learn from their perspectives on training’.

## **The portfolio and declarative methods: into the future.**

I remain hopeful that whatever form of ToT follows TALE that the role of the portfolio might be rethought to take it in the direction of making it an instrument of external validation, perhaps alongside other methods of assessment including monitoring participant responses in carefully designed simulations where flexible underpinning trainer competences might be put to use. The conditions under which progress might be made are not yet in place. There is no agreed competence framework for ToT and even if there were issues of the relationship between European and national qualifications frameworks would still need to be addressed.

Nevertheless TALE has been ambivalent before this agenda, applying the brake as much as pressing the accelerator. One team member asserted bluntly that the portfolio was ‘not intended as a certification tool’; another that it could be although certification was in any case ‘a minor issue’. A third adopted the more subtle distinction that a TALE portfolio was intended to ‘exemplify’ attained competences but not to ‘demonstrate’ them, which would be a step in the wrong direction. I got the feeling that there is no particular enthusiasm in TALE for taking the ‘recognition of NFE trainers’ debate in the direction of eventually marrying it with European qualifications frameworks, with all that implies concerning specification of levels and what counts as demonstration. I addressed this issue in an earlier document and I believe my analysis remains intact.

In the TALE account a portfolio is not so much an artifact to be presented as evidence of competences gained for purposes of professional recognition and validation as a creative, dynamic and exploratory tool anchored in the activity of the participant trainers and facilitating their personal growth. It was a reflective diary charting the impact of TALE and motivated primarily by self-assessment driven by a desire for personal growth.

This is one reason why the wording of the TALE Certificate is so disappointing. It is in two parts. The first part acknowledges attendance at TALE (‘took part in’) and describes the aim of the course (‘meant to contribute...’) rather than what can be read into successfully

completing the course. The second part of the certificate, not underwritten by the official signatures, is for all practical purposes an internal document that lists the 18 competences 'referred to' in TALE and then allows the participants to state which competences they 'developed in particular'. They then self-assess evidence of 'learning achievements' in relation to the chosen competences, and this is lightly moderated, the mentors not so much validating the claims as acknowledging that they 'accompanied the learning process'.

Thankfully the 'soft recognition' is more convincing, with many national stakeholders testifying unequivocally to the differences made, although one discordant voice suggested that exposure to TALE had made one participant more secure in sectarian certainties and less willing to question assumptions.

DJ January 2011

---